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Issue 134 January 2016 £4.60

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MEALS IN
MINUTES

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ANTHEM



01

Issue 134
January 2016
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Welcome!



You want to get off the beaten track and discover parts of Italy that are less well known than the familiar tourist sites. We know this because you've told us. We've had many letters and emails asking for the 'secret Italy' that can be found when one looks further afield than Rome, Venice, Tuscany and so on. And so, in this issue we

present you with 48 Hours in Triona, a small town in Liguria noted for its serenity and beauty, and for its relative lack of tourists. Turn to page 36 to find out how Jane Keightley got on.

As you'll have noticed on this month's cover, we've got something of a foodie feel going on – quite timely, given that we're in the middle of the festival season, we thought. As well as some stunning wines from the Barolo region of Piedmont (from page 89) we explore the gastronomy of the Val d'Orcia in Tuscany, we present plenty of quick and easy recipes to fill your friends and family at this busy time of the year (from page 79) and we take a look at the very best places in the UK to buy fine, genuine Italian produce in our Gourmet Guide Special (from page 74).

Of course there's more. Our sub editor Jon Palmer spends some time in and around Mantua on his way to the Po Delta; we have our regular properties sections (Homes in Le Marche and houses for sale in Puglia, from pages 22 and 50 respectively); and we have our must-read news, events and Top Picks sections. Enjoy!

Paul P.

Paul Pettengale Editor

PS *Italia!*'s brand new guide to Rome & the South is on sale now (£7.99). Visit www.italytravelandlife.com/italiaguides for details.

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Subscribe to *Italia!* for our exclusive Christmas book offer* and get the magazine delivered directly to your door every month! Turn to page 32 for more information.

*UK orders only



48 Hours in Triona, page 36

AWARD WINNER!
The Italian Tourist Board voted *Italia!* the 'Best Overall Publication 2011'



THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



JON PALMER is the backbone of the *Italia!* production process, but he's also a true Italophile and has travelled extensively throughout the country. He's recently

come back from a trip to the Po Delta, beginning his excursion in the city of Mantua, recently appointed 2016 Italian City of Culture. Join him on page 44.



FLEUR KINSON returns to familiar territory in this issue of *Italia!*, examining the property market in the ever-popular Le Marche region. Whereas other regions throughout

the peninsula have suffered during the Eurozone crisis, Le Marche has remained robust, offering mountains, plains and its famed coastline. Turn to page 22.



JANE KEIGHTLEY is a seasoned travel journalist and specialises in all things Italian. So she was the obvious choice when we asked her to find somewhere a little

more remote for our discerning readers who want to avoid hordes of tourists. She decided upon the Ligurian citadel of Triona. Let her lead you through it from page 36.



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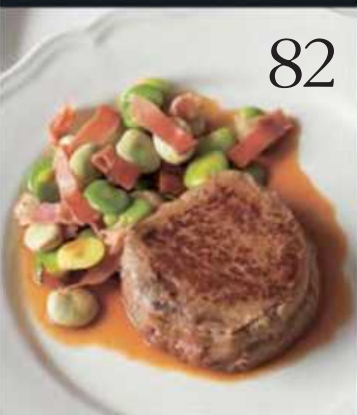


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Puglia is served by two major airports and the property market here is buoyant.

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Jane Keightley climbs into the Ligurian hills.

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Jane Keightley travelled with Voyages Jules Verne on their Secret Italy package to explore Assisi and its surroundings.

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With a history steeped in the *Cucina Povera*, the Val d'Orcia offers taste and tradition. **Wanda Djebbar** guides us on a gastro tour.



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Lorenza Bacino has been finding out where you can buy the tastiest Italian ingredients here in the UK.

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YOUR ITALIA!

READERS' PHOTO COMPETITION!

Send us your favourite photos from your Italian travels, and each month the best photo will win a bottle of **Nino Franco Rustico Prosecco** and cooler!*



▲ **THIS MONTH'S WINNER**
Peter Colligan, Waterloooville, Hampshire

"During our stay in Assisi we took an early morning stroll up to the Rocca Maggiore and were rewarded with this atmospheric view of the town and the sweep of the Vale of Spoleto below."



WIN!
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PROSECCO & CHILLER*



◀ *David Brand,
Hamilton, Scotland*
“Please find photos from
our recent holiday in
Reggio di Calabria. At
the waterfall at San
Nicola we experienced
a fantastic atmosphere
and stunning images
with only a small
number of tourists
mixed with many local
Italians, swimming,
sunbathing and having
a barbecue.”



Sue Perry, Victoria, Australia
“On our last visit to Lucca we spent many hours riding
around the ‘Mura’ (walls) and saw this little dog
making itself at home in his owner’s bicycle basket!”



Mark Rea, Brighton “View of Ischia Porto, Ischia.”



◀ *Rachel Anderson,
Kingston, Surrey*
“We were on a hiking
holiday in Liguria
and on a walk
between Camogli
and Portofino when
we came across this
very appropriate
sight!”



*Ekaterina Virshits,
Minsk, Belarus*
“Hi! My favourite
photo of Italy!
Bardolino.”

HOW TO ENTER Email high-resolution (300dpi) jpegs of your photos of Italy to italia@anthem-publishing.com or send prints to ‘Reader Photo Competition’ at the address given on page 18. Please include a brief explanation of your photo, plus your name, delivery address and a phone number (for our couriers). You must be over 18 to enter.

READER OFFER *Italia!* readers get a 10 per cent discount off Nino Franco wines from www.sommelierschoice.com until 31 January 2016 by entering the code ‘italia10’ at the checkout.

Please note: Any photos you submit must be your own work and you must have the right to send them for inclusion on this page. By sending your entry, you are confirming that *Italia!*’s use of your photo(s) will not constitute infringement of any rights, and confirming that you are over 18.

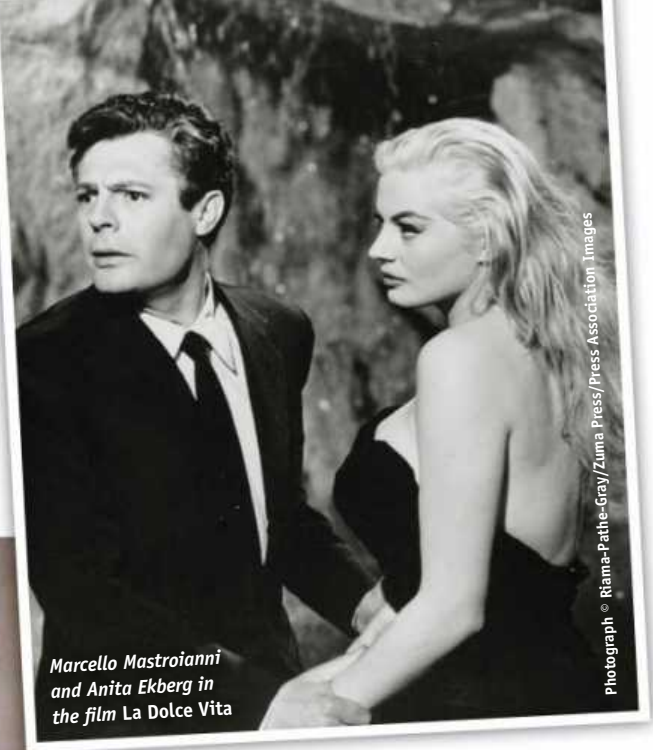


*Prosecco and cooler delivered to mainland UK addresses only

THIS MONTH

January 2016

In **Italian news** this month, restorations at the Trevi Fountain and the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, and perhaps a Tuscan home too...



Marcello Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg in the film *La Dolce Vita*

Photograph © Rima-Pathe-Graf/Zuma Press/Press Association Images



The Trevi Fountain at its reopening

Photograph © AP/Press Association Images

VIVA LA TREV-OLUTION!

It's one of Rome's most stunning tourist attractions, and was the setting for a famous scene in the film *La Dolce Vita*, where Marcello Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg took a midnight swim in their evening clothes. But for the past 16 months, the Trevi Fountain has been off-limits, undergoing restoration work. Now, it's reopened and is looking back to its best. The €2million work was sponsored by Italian fashion house Fendi, and creative director Silvia Venturini Fendi said at the reopening, "It's very emotional, especially for us Romans." The Trevi Fountain was built in 1762 under the guidance of architect Niccolò Pannini, and features a marble sculpture of the water god Oceanus. Thousands of tourists visit the site and follow the tradition of throwing a coin over their shoulder into the water. On average, around €1million worth of coins are tossed in every year, before being gathered up and donated to charity.



During its restoration



Gathering the coins

"Cleaning fontana di Trevi - Foto Giovanni Dall'Orto" by G.dall'orto - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 2.5 via Wikimedia Commons

"Fontana di Trevi din Roma 1" by Cezar Suceveanu - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS

ZOLA'S BUDDING GELATO VENTURE

Not content with exporting Italian football to England, Gianfranco Zola has exported Italian ice cream there, too. The diminutive former Chelsea midfielder has opened a new café called UNICO in Bromley, south London, with the intention of serving up frozen goodness from the gelato capital, Bologna. "We were fed up with travelling to Bologna every time to have a proper ice cream," he said. "It's cheaper to come here. I'm a real ice cream lover and that's the main reason I'm here." UNICO will also sell a range of cakes and coffee from around the world – but mainly from Italy, of course.

GORE VIDAL'S PARTY MANSION FOR SALE

An Italian mansion that once belonged to Gore Vidal has gone up for sale. The clifftop residence, which overlooks the sea at Ravello, La Rondinaia, was the home of the celebrated US author and his partner Howard Austen from 1972 to 2004. During that time, it hosted some legendary parties, attended by the likes of Mick Jagger, Hilary Clinton and Susan Sarandon. The 10,500-square-foot property contains seven bedrooms, six bathrooms, a swimming pool, olive and lemon groves, and balconies that afford spectacular views of the Amalfi Coast, so is unlikely to be short of potential buyers – even at the asking price of \$21.1million.



'Donatello, maria maddalena 10" by I, Saikko. Licensed under CC BY 2.5 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Donatello,_maria_maddalena_10.JPG#/media/File:Donatello,_maria_maddalena_10.JPG



Finally, the scaffolding has come down in central Florence, and the fruits of the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo's 30-month restoration work have been revealed. It's been worth the wait. The project, which is believed to have cost as much as €50million, has seen the gallery's floor space increase threefold to 6,000 square metres, which has enabled the curators to feature many more artefacts. These include Donatello's sculpture *Magdalene*, and 27 stunning silk and gold panels embroidered by Antonio dell Pollaiuolo. Renovation work to the Great Hall means it's now the largest single gallery space in Florence – and on a par with Vatican City's Sistine Chapel. But the most impressive new feature is a full-scale recreation of the original façade of the Duomo, Florence's famous cathedral, which is just across the road. The Museo dell'Opera del Duomo is the world's largest repository of Florentine Medieval and Renaissance sculpture, with around 750 statues and 250 artworks.

We've all had days when we've wished we were at the beach instead of at work. But council workers in San Remo on the Italian Riviera turned the fantasy into reality, on an alarming number of occasions. An investigation carried out by the town's police discovered that over the course of a month, around 75 per cent of the council workforce skived off work in favour of more leisurely pursuits. Many headed to the seaside, but others found even that too taxing – one man turned up in his underpants, clocked in and went straight back to bed. The exploits were captured by hidden surveillance cameras, and 35 arrests have been made. "We will take a hard line against those who are shown to have behaved improperly," said San Remo's Mayor, Alberto Biancheri. "Sadly, we now find ourselves with offices that are devoid of any employees. The council is in danger of grinding to a halt."



Photograph © iStock, unless otherwise stated

S...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS

A modern-art intallation in South Tyrol was thrown in the bin after a cleaner mistook it for rubbish. Milanese duo Goldschmied & Chiari's *Where Shall We Go Dancing Tonight?* saw the floor of the Museion Bozen-Bolzano scattered with empty champagne bottles, cigarette ends and streamers. It was meant to represent the hedonism and corruption of the 1980s, but the cleaner in question thought it was the remnants of a party the night before and tossed it in the trash can. The installation has now been restored, with the gallery joking that they had had some "bad luck with the new cleaning lady".

You might have to speak a bit louder the next time you're in the Ligurian town of Gorreto – it has the oldest population in Europe. The average age of the 94 residents is 65.1 years, and there's a worry that the town could disappear without trace unless younger people start moving in. "If we go on like this, in ten years we'll definitely be a ghost town," an employee of Gorreto's town hall told website *The Local*. Gorreto is situated in the Trebbia Valley between Genoa and Piacenza, a valley Ernest Hemingway once described as the most beautiful in the world.



Heavy rain caused flooding in parts of Italy in October and a pasta maker in Benevento was badly damaged



SPAGHETTI BETTER SOON

When heavy rain caused flooding in parts of Italy in October, one business took a particular battering. Rummo, a family-run pasta maker in Benevento, near Naples, was badly damaged, and there was concern that it could cripple the company, which has been in business since 1846. So much concern, in fact, that almost 90,000 people sent online messages of sympathy in the 24 hours after the incident, and a campaign was set up by 25-year-old Luciano Lobosco encouraging people to buy Rummo products. The campaign quickly gathered momentum and soon had the support of everyone from politicians to celebrity chefs. Understandably, Rummo has so far been unable to pass comment on the public reaction, but one thing is for certain – food lovers across Italy are keeping their fingers crossed that the company will soon be putting pasta back in their pots.



Photograph © Domenico Stinellis/AP/Press Association Images

ROME'S SECRET RAMP

A 2,000-year-old 'imperial ramp' used by Roman Emperors to pass unseen from their palaces on Rome's Palatine Hill to the Forum has opened to the public for the first time. The covered passageway was discovered in 1900 and partially excavated, but the project was abandoned and was only rekindled a few years ago. The entrance has been completely rebuilt using chunks of the original marble, while rooms leading off the main concourse have been converted into a museum. Historians estimate that the passageway was originally 300 yards long, but some of it was destroyed by an earthquake in the 9th century. Nevertheless, it remains a spectacular sight. "The ceilings are eleven metres high, so it really is a big structure," said archaeologist Patrizia Fortini. And if you make it to the top, you'll be rewarded with an equally impressive sight – a birdseye view over the city. No wonder those Emperors chose to live up there!



CASTLE OF COLOUR

A spectacular Tuscan property is to be offered at auction for a third time – on the previous two occasions it received no bids. Built by Ximenes of Aragon in 1605, Sammezzano Castle became the subject of a mesmerizing revamp centuries later when Ximenes' descendant, the eccentric liberal politician Ferdinando Panciatichi Ximenes, moved in. Starting around 1850, Ferdinando spent four decades using the walls of the castle's 365 rooms – and also its gardens – as a blank canvas for his wild creativity. Everywhere you look, there are frescoes inspired by Arabic, Persian, Indian, Spanish and Byzantine cultures – even though Ximenes never actually visited any of those places. After he died, the castle's fortunes dipped; it was looted by the Nazis and then became a hotel frequented by prostitutes. Sammezzano is to be auctioned again in February, with an asking price of £10.6million.

HANDS OFF OUR HAM!

And here's our most random story of the month. It's been revealed that the most frequently stolen items in East Lancashire are knickers, wine... and Italian ham. The report was released by security firm Checkpoint Systems as a way of encouraging retailers to be vigilant in the run-up to Christmas. The theft of lingerie and alcohol is perhaps not so difficult to comprehend, but somewhat more surprising is that shoplifters are targeting the deli counter. Said the report, "Interestingly, one major UK retailer is security tagging prosciutto ham in an effort to reduce shrinkage of one of its most popular festive food lines over the key winter sales period."

LOST AND FOUND... THEN LOST AGAIN

A Spanish doctor who went missing 20 years ago has been found living in a forest in Tuscany. Carlos Sanchez Ortiz De Salazar, 47, left his home in Seville in 1995 after suffering from depression, and was believed to have headed to Maremma to live as a hermit. However, after he'd not been heard from for 14 years, he was declared dead in 2009. Two Italian mushroom pickers discovered Mr De Salazar "with a dirty face and a large beard" but, after showing them his passport to prove his identity, he fled. His parents told the *Corriere Della Sera* newspaper, "He's alive and that's the most important thing."



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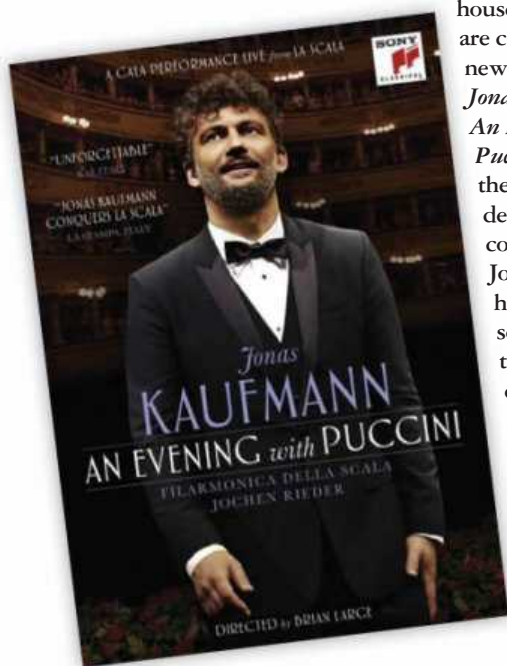
ITALIA!'S *Top picks*

Opera, truffles, prosecco, wine tasting, designer gear and romantic literature set in Tuscany... It can only be our regular round-up of **the best of Italy** this month...

AN EVENING WITH PUCCINI

With his rugged good looks and soaring tenor voice, Jonas Kaufmann is one of the most popular stars in opera today. The German's triumphant performances of some of Puccini's repertoire at Milan's La Scala opera

house last summer are captured in a new DVD/Blu-ray, *Jonas Kaufmann: An Evening With Puccini*. Backed by the Filarmonica della Scala and conducted by Jochen Rieder, his singing was so good that the audience demanded no less than 40 minutes of encores! £11.99 DVD/£17.99 Blu-ray, www.amazon.co.uk



USE THIS!



ADOPT A TRUFFLE TREE

Looking for an unique holiday gift? Adopt an Italian truffle tree as a luxurious and eco-friendly gift and celebrate nature's mysteries! When you adopt you share in the commitment for an eco-friendly environment supporting sustainable farming methods and reducing CO2 emissions. Every adoption includes a sumptuous gift box with carefully chosen truffle products, foods and a special gift card for £98. www.lacerqua.com

DESIGNER WASTE BIN

It's not very often we feature something that's a load of rubbish – but essentially, that's what this Ovetto bin from LOVETHESIGN will be once it's installed in your kitchen. The point is, it'll be a very stylish load of rubbish. Manufactured in Italy by Soldi Design, its futuristic shape will make it a real talking point among your house guests. It's practical, too, featuring three separate compartments for different kinds of waste, and a flap for the easy removal of bin bags. £99, www.lovetheesign.com

TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...

Top 3 fabulous FRESH PASTAS

In our busy lives we often don't have time to make it but there is nothing quite like **fresh pasta**. Here are some choice imported options for you to try...

1 SPIGA WITH TRUFFLE AND RICOTTA
Made exclusively for Camisa in the small northern Italian town of Brescia using best quality flour and free-range eggs this pasta is delivered fresh to Camisa every Monday. The Truffle and Ricotta is quite exceptional and has recently been awarded a Highly Commended certificate at the Quality Food Awards. Pop it into boiling water for two to three minutes, then drain and serve with a nob of butter and some freshly grated parmesan. £4.99 www.camisa.co.uk





PROSECCO POSTER

If you want to add some fizz to your home furnishings, what better way to do it than with a framed poster reminding you of the delights of Prosecco (as if you ever needed it!). Measuring 290mm x 440mm, 'Prosecco Time' comes in a choice of four chic colours (Grey & Lime, Sepia, Mauve and Pink & Grey), and either a black or white glass-glazed frame. Just be careful not to smash it when you pop open that cork! £38, www.uniqueposters.co.uk

BUY THIS!

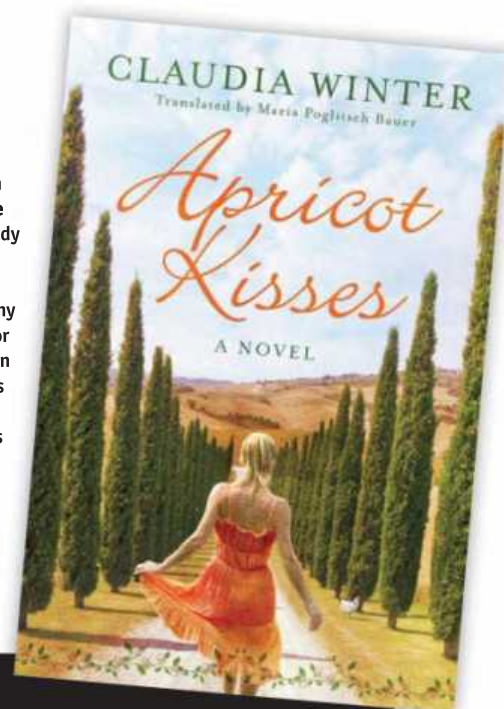


WINE TASTING BOX

For a novel party idea, why not invite your friends and family around for an Italian wine-tasting evening? Fortnum & Mason's Italian Tasting Selection Box is the perfect prop, comprising a quartet of delectable tipples from the country's historic vineyards: there's a plum-flavoured Valpolicella, a ruby red Rosso Piceno, a zesty, citric Greco di Tufo and, our favourite, a Gavi Terrarossa, a yummy golden white with notes of Amalfi lemons. You could, of course, forget the guests and keep them all to yourself... £55, www.fortnumandmason.com

APRICOT KISSES

When a female gastronomy critic slates a Tuscan restaurant at which she's recently dined, she gets more than she bargained for – the old lady who owns it promptly keels over and dies! Faced with a lawsuit, the hapless journalist returns to Tuscany to apologise to the lady's family for her part in the tragedy, and is given an unusual ultimatum by the lady's handsome young grandson: marry me and I'll drop the charges. That's the basis of the plot of Claudia Winter's new novel, *Apricot Kisses*, and if you like food, travel and romance, it's the perfect tonic for the winter blues. £3.99 (Kindle Edition) www.amazon.co.uk



ITALIAN TRAVEL BAG

If you're planning a post-Christmas Italian break, why not go the whole hog and get yourself some Italian luggage to put your belongings in? This gorgeous Alessia holdall, handmade from durable, vegetable-tanned leather and coated in fake-pigskin waterproofing, is the perfect size for weekends away, and features an internal zipped compartment for storing your wallet, passport, etc.

Perhaps if you order it, your other half will get the hint and buy the tickets! £299, www.lhco.co.uk



THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS

2 MATTARELLO WILD MUSHROOM MOZZARELLA RAVIOLONI

Italian, restaurant-quality pasta made in Italy for sharing at home with good friends and lively conversation. The Wild Mushroom and Mozzarella Ravioloni have a wonderfully creamy, melted-mozzarella and porcini filling. A very comforting and easy to prepare dish. Serve with melted butter and grated parmesan – and with laughter and joy to people you love! Serves 2. RRP £4.50. Available from Ocado.com and selected Waitrose stores.



3 HANDMADE PUMPKIN TORTELLONI

If you are looking for an authentic fresh pasta, made according to a classic north Italian recipe, La Tua Pasta Tortelloni Pumpkin will be your perfect choice this season! Their tortelloni are hand-folded and the pasta is made using premium Italian flours and eggs. The filling is made with sweet Italian pumpkins combined with delicate ricotta and tasty parmesan cheese. Enjoy a real restaurant experience at home. Buon appetito! £4.99 www.ocado.com



EVENTS IN JANUARY 2016

The Italians celebrate the **New Year in Italy** in style, with opera in Florence on New Year's Day, an Epiphany procession in Milan on the 6th, followed by a national holiday for the Festival of the Tricolour, the nation's flag, on the 7th...

1 NEW YEAR'S DAY GALA
2 1 January
3 Florence
 You won't find a more
 4 uplifting way to start
 the new year than with
 5 some traditional Italian
 opera. The historic
 6 Teatro Verdi in Florence
 is the setting for such a
 7 concert, which will take
 in festive Viennese
 8 waltzes and polkas,
 as well as popular
 9 Italian arias and duets,
 including works by
 10 Verdi and Rossini. Look
 out for talented local
 11 tenor Giorgio Casciarri,
 who has performed
 12 in such prestigious
 venues as New York's
 13 Metropolitan Opera and
 Milan's Scala.
 14 www.teatroverdionline.it

CORTEO DEI RE MAGI
6 January
Milan
 The Three Kings, the
 Three Wise Men, the
 Magi... whatever you call
 them, this trio played
 an important role in the
 Nativity story. So why
 are we mentioning them
 in January? Because
 today is Epiphany, a
 feast day on which many
 Christians commemorate
 the wizened gift-
 bearers. In Italy, it's
 a public holiday, and
 nowhere is the occasion
 better celebrated than
 in Milan, where three
 actors playing Balthasar,
 Melchior and Gaspar
 lead a procession to the
 Piazza Duomo, before
 handing out gifts to
 poor children of the city.

FESTA DEL TRICOLORE
7 January
Nationwide
 Back in 1796, that
 unruly conqueror
 Napoleon Bonaparte
 arrived in Italy and
 declared, "The national
 colours to adopt are
 the green, the white
 and the red." The
 natives duly complied,
 and two centuries on
 they're fiercely proud
 of their flag. Evidence
 of that is plentiful on
 this annual outpouring
 of patriotism, when
 homes, businesses and
 state buildings across
 the country raise their
 ensigns in celebration
 of what it means to
 be Italian. Perhaps
 unsurprisingly, Monsieur
 Bonaparte rarely gets a
 mention.

PITTI IMMAGINE UOMO 89
12-15 January
Florence
 Whether you prefer
 rocking the latest
 clothes from Gucci,
 Armani or Dolce &
 Gabbana, you'll likely
 be in agreement that
 some of the world's
 best fashion brands
 are based in Italy. And
 twice a year, many of
 them converge under
 the same roof, at
 Florence's Fortezza da
 Basso military fort. The
 theme for this year's
 show is the co-existence
 of different generations
 in today's fashion
 trends, and guest
 designers will include
 Juun.J (menswear)
 and Marco De Vincenzo
 (womenswear).
www.pittiimmagine.com/en

VIVA GLI SPOSI
14-17 January
Como
 Getting married
 is meant to be the
 happiest time of your
 life, but many of us
 end up tearing our hair
 out as we scour the
 internet for the best
 venues, stationery
 and garments. The
 annual Viva gli Sposi
 wedding fair aims to
 take the stress out of
 the process. Located
 in the picturesque
 lakeside city of Como,
 it's a massive one-stop
 shop covering all the
 essentials for your
 big day, from dresses
 to doilies, suits to
 speeches.
www.vivaglisposi.org

FESTA DI SANT'ANTONIO ABATE
17 January
Nationwide
 If you smell smoke
 today, don't panic – it's
 just the Italian people
 trying to outdo each
 other with the best
 bonfire! It's in honour
 of Anthony, an Egyptian
 abbot who, according to
 legend, descended to
 Hell to steal the Devil's
 fire. Anthony is also the
 patron saint of domestic
 animals (bet you never
 even knew there was
 such a thing!), so all
 across Italy, owners of
 sickly pets take them
 down to their local
 church to be blessed by
 the priest.



SIGEP, Rimini, 23-27 January

FESTA DI SAN SEBASTIANO

20 January
Nationwide

Saint Sebastian was a 3rd-century martyr killed during Roman Emperor Diocletian's persecution of the Christians. This sacrifice for his faith has seen him honoured by artists including Botticelli and Titian, and on this day every year there are events held nationwide to celebrate his life. One of the most memorable happens in the Sicilian town of Palazzolo Acreide, where a huge statue of the Saint is carried out of the local church, before (real-life) babies are offered to it for a blessing.

SIGEP

23-27 January
Rimini

Honestly, what chance do you have of sticking to that healthy new year diet when, three weeks later, along comes a massive five-day exhibition dedicated to *gelato*, chocolate and pastries? Considering the Rimini Fiera will be jam-packed with stalls offering samples of the finest Italian desserts, while top chefs serve up demonstrations and tips on how to conjure up your own sweet treats, we'd have to say: not a very good one. You can always restart your diet in February. en.sigep.it

HOMI MILANO

29 January – 1 February
Milan

If you count 'keeping up with the Joneses' among your favourite pastimes, you'd better grab yourself a ticket to this twice-annual 'lifestyle trade fair' in Milan's Fiera Milano Rho. Held over four days, it's a treasure trove of goodies to make you, your life and your home more attractive. Whether you fancy some new fashion or fragrance, jewellery or gym equipment, patio furniture or pottery, there will be exhibitors on hand to tempt you with their latest wares. www.homimilano.com

ARTE FIERA

29 January – 1 February
Bologna

Suffering from post-Christmas blues? One way to cheer yourself up would be to buy a new work of art to grace your home. If you lean towards the modern end of the scale, you'll find a vast selection of contemporary pieces at this annual fair, which has been drawing in international art enthusiasts to the BolognaFiere since 1974 – last year, there were no less than 216 exhibitors and 188 galleries. Even if you can't afford to buy anything, it makes for a great day's browsing! www.artefiera.bolognafiare.it

CARNIVAL OF VENICE

29 January – 9 February

Venice
Alongside Rio and Notting Hill, Venice hosts one of the world's biggest, best and oldest carnivals. Central to the 12-day event are the elaborate costumes and masks that thousands wear to attend the many glamorous balls that take place across the city. But there's so much more to see and do, from party cruises to guided tours, special dinners to decorated flotillas – make the most of it, because the end of the Carnival coincides with the start of Lent. www.venice-carnival-italy.com

FIERA DI SANT'ORSO AOSTA

30 & 31 January
Aosta

Strolling around this annual fair in Aosta, one phrase comes to mind: "If only this could take place before Christmas, not after." It would be the perfect setting for gathering presents for your nearest and dearest – a charming clutter of craft stalls selling everything from handknits to homebaked goodies, set against a backdrop of snow-capped Alpine peaks. Still, the post-Christmas slot doesn't seem to have done business any harm – the event has been running for nigh on 800 years.

VIEWPOINT

Dawn breaks over **the Po Delta** on a cold and grey late autumn morning, from a fisherman's hut nets hang suspended over the water, waiting for the tides to dictate the start of the next shift...

Fishing in the Po Delta is big business. Scenes like this – an isolated fisherman's hut with nets hanging from rigging over the water – are everywhere. This is a 'transitional marsh environment', one where the fresh water of the Po meets the salt water of the Adriatic in countless small bodies of shallow waters that combine to create a biodiversity unparalleled in Italian waters – and far beyond. Scardovari mussels and Polesine clams are among the great prizes of the Po Delta; anchovies and sardines, bluefish, eels and mullets are also landed.

Yet the very success of the Delta as a fishery is also a threat to it. The place where this photograph was taken lies in a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This protects the region's unique habitats. But UNESCO World Heritage Sites also attract tourists, and tourists travel through marshes in boats (boats such as the one this photograph was taken from), and those boats get in the way of the fishing boats and their nets. The locals would like to have the income from both fishing and tourism, but it may be that one day they'll have to choose. **1**





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LETTERS TO ITALIA!

Share your Italian experiences with us, and tell us what you would like to see in the magazine, by sending your photographs and letters to italia@anthem-publishing.com...



The Fiat 500, another classic Italian design icon, and a candidate for our new final page feature.

CITIES TOUR

I went on a fantastic eight-day Italian cities tour in August, which I would love to tell you about. I went to Venice, Verona, Florence, Siena, Rome and Assisi. It was just breathtaking.

Venice was fabulous. Out of this world. I went on a gondola and on a boat to see the islands around the city. You just have to go there to realise how spectacular it all is. It looks just like in the movies. I saw the famous St Mark's Church and the Square and took some great photos of the city.

In Verona, I saw the famous theatre where they have all the concerts and went to the balcony of Romeo and Juliet. It is a city for lovers, like Venice, although while I was there it decided to pour down with rain at one point and I nearly got soaked!

Florence was brilliant. The city apparently has 50 per cent of all of Italy's art. The outside of the Duomo, the famous church in the picturesque postcard that you often see of Florence, was stunning but inside it was not that fascinating as it was rather empty of art, but still the architecture was fantastic. I went to the famous town hall where they have the statue of David by Michelangelo outside the front entrance. That was great, although it is actually a copy. I saw Florence from high up as well whilst on a roof top café.

Siena is a good little town where I saw the main area where they have the famous Palio horse race as well as some other sites.

Rome was impressive. I took a coach tour of the city, which included the famous Colosseum, and then I went to the Vatican Museums and saw the famous Sistine Chapel frescoes by Michelangelo. Then I went into St Peter's Church. Initially I thought the Sistine Chapel was in St Peter's Church but I found out that it is in the Vatican Museums. I went to the Trevi fountain where you throw a coin over your shoulder into the fountain. I did not expect it to be so big as I thought it was a small fountain but it's really huge!

The last place I went to was Assisi, the town of the famous Saint Francis. I saw his church and his tomb. It's called the city of peace, as that was what St Francis encouraged. I'm not religious but it was a very spiritual experience.

Overall, I would love to see Florence and Rome again as there is a lot more to see and do in those cities. As I spent only eight days in Italy and did a lot of travelling, it would be great to get back and spend more time in one of those two cities. At times, it was very hot there. I can understand why Italians head to the seaside or the countryside in summer as it can be really hot in the cities and towns. Temperatures were very high at times. I can't wait to go again though!

Joe Piroli, London

OF THE
MONTH
JAN
2016

ITALIA! GAZZETTA

First of all, congratulations on an excellent magazine. I always look forward to it dropping through the letter box and it never fails to impress. A couple of points I would like you to consider. I remember at one time you had a parallel text page where the article was written both in English and Italian, which, as someone interested in languages, I always enjoyed. This suddenly disappeared. I am now actively studying Italian and wondered if you would consider reinstating one or two pages in said parallel text. In addition, I wondered if there were other like-minded *Italia!* readers who, in order to enhance their experiences in Italy, have also undertaken to learn the language and who may be interested in regular communication via email. The participants would benefit from more frequent usage of the language especially if one or two were native speakers as often attending evening classes etc is not suitable.

Graham Milne, Kinghorn, Fife

You'll be delighted to hear, Graham, that we have now reinstated our Gazzetta column. It took a while to find the right author, though as it turned out he was right under our noses. Tom Alberto Bull is fluent in both Italian and English, being the son of a native Italian woman (Professor of Italian History and Politics at the University of Bath). He's also related to my wife! You can read about Tom's experiences of living in Bologna, where he studied at the world-famous university, over the page.

WHERE WOULD YOU LIVE?

I've just finished reading my monthly subscription copy of *Italia!* and thought I'd sent you an email. What an impossible question to ask! "Where would you choose to live?" regarding the many stunning cities in Italy! There can only be one answer, which,



of course, is Rome. It's central with good rail links to the other cities; it's vibrant, non-stop and has stunning history and architecture. It has the best restaurants in the country, its nightlife is unparalleled and its people friendly. Though, I admit, driving around Rome can be rather traumatic at times.

Jeremy Grimstead, via email

A case well made, but each of Italy's cities has a very different vibe and what appeals to one may not appeal to another. Of course, I can't possibly say which city I'd choose to put down my roots!

ITALIA! ICONS

Love the new *Icons* column on your back page. I can see this one running for a very long time indeed! Can readers make suggestions? I'd go for some of the classic Italian dishes – pizza for example! It's a dish that has gone global. Or, having seen you've just covered the Dino by Ferrari, how about the original Fiat 500? I could spend hours writing a complete list. Why not set up a vote on your Facebook page?

Sofia Cook, Brighton

We're always open to suggestions! The list the Italia! team has created already runs to over 50 entries, but we'd like to encourage readers to have their say!

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GAZZETTA ITALIA!

In the second instalment of our reprised bilingual column, Anglo-Italian **Tom Alberto Bull** recalls the year he spent at Bologna University as part of his modern languages degree...

Si, Professore?

Uno dei motivi principali per cui ho deciso di studiare l'italiano all'università è stato perché il corso di laurea dava la possibilità di andare all'estero in una università italiana per un anno tramite il programma Erasmus. Scorrendo la lista delle possibili opzioni rimasi piacevolmente sorpreso di trovare Bologna, la più antica università del mondo occidentale e una tra le più stimate nel paese.

Arrivato in città, la mia prima preoccupazione fu di cercarmi un alloggio. Evidentemente ero stato un po' ingenuo perché la ricerca si rivelò molto più difficile del previsto. Non mi ero reso conto che era considerato del tutto normale condividere una stanza con un perfetto estraneo. Né avevo preso in considerazione la grande richiesta di alloggi che, unitamente al mio ritardo nell'arrivare a Bologna, mi lasciava una scelta molto limitata.

Con un po' di aiuto dall'ufficio universitario per le residenze studentesche mi sistemai alla fine in un vecchio appartamento in pieno centro, che dividevo con studenti di varie nazionalità: portoghese, siriana, francese e spagnola oltre ad un unico e solitario italiano che con mia sorpresa trovavo piuttosto difficile comprendere, dal momento che parlava con un forte accento regionale.

Una volta sistemato mi affrettai ad incontrare la persona che mi era stata assegnata come tutore. Nonostante la difficoltà a trovarlo in ufficio, mi fu di grande aiuto per iscrivermi a vari corsi di studio per l'anno accademico. Le materie scelte riguardavano la letteratura, il cinema e la lingua italiana, perché erano quelle che avevo già studiato, anche se ho notato una tendenza evidente da parte del tutore a riempire di studenti Erasmus le classi meno frequentate.

Una occupazione in corso di importanti edifici universitari da parte degli studenti arrabbiati che protestavano per gli aumenti delle tasse di iscrizione rese più difficile l'accesso alle lezioni, ma la cosa non mi turbava più di tanto e tra l'altro mi permetteva anche una comprensione molto interessante dei movimenti studenteschi in Italia e del loro modo di agire piuttosto diverso dal nostro.

Ma il contrasto più forte doveva ancora venire. In Gran Bretagna siamo abituati a svolgere gli esami scritti in condizioni rigorosamente formali. In Italia, gli esami si svolgono in forma orale tra lo studente e il professore, e ai colleghi è consentito di attendere il proprio turno a portata di orecchio. I voti sono assegnati immediatamente dopo l'esame e in alcuni casi, a seconda dell'indulgenza dell'insegnante, sono persino negoziabili. E' una situazione bizzarra ma può anche rivelarsi vantaggiosa se la si affronta nel modo giusto.

Nel mio caso riuscii a imparare l'arte di cavarmela quel tanto da essere promosso, con qualche buon voto qua e là. L'effetto duraturo del mio anno come studente Erasmus rimane comunque l'esperienza culturale e l'immersione nella lingua italiana che mi permisero un enorme miglioramento nella fluidità del parlato e dello scritto.

Yes, Professor?

One of the major reasons why I chose to study Italian as part of my degree was because the course offered the chance to go abroad to an Italian university for a year as an Erasmus student. As I scrolled down my list of potential choices I was pleasantly surprised to see Bologna, the oldest university in the western world and considered among the best in the country.

Upon arriving in the city my first task was to find some accommodation. I may have been a tad naive but this proved to be far more difficult than I had anticipated. I wasn't aware that it was commonplace to share a room with a complete stranger. Nor did I consider the high demand which, coupled with my late arrival, resulted in slim pickings. With a little help from the student accommodation office I settled for a worn-down apartment in a central location, shared with an eclectic mix of nationalities; Portuguese, Syrian, French, Spanish, and a solitary Italian who, as he spoke with a strong regional dialect, actually turned out to be quite difficult to understand.

Once settled in I met my designated tutor. Despite being difficult to pin down, he was considerably helpful in enrolling me onto suitable courses for the year. The subjects centred around literature, film, and language which were familiar to me from back home, although there was a definite tendency to fill classes that were low on numbers with Erasmus students.

An ongoing occupation of some key university buildings by disgruntled students as a form of protest for rising tuition fees made access to some lessons difficult. Not that it bothered me, it was a fascinating insight into grassroots movements in Italy and how their way of doing things somewhat differs from ours.

Yet the starkest contrast was yet to come. In the UK we are accustomed to written exams in strict conditions. In Italy the exams are spoken aloud between you and your professor, with your peers allowed to wait for their turn within ears distance. The marks are dished out immediately and in some cases, depending on the leniency of your teacher, are negotiable. It's a bizarre environment that can be advantageous but only if confronted in the right way.

I mastered the art sufficiently well to pass my year with the odd good mark thrown in. However the lasting effect of my year remains the cultural experience and the immersion in the Italian language which greatly improved my fluency. ■



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Homes in Le Marche

A buyers' favourite, this central Italian region enjoys great weather, glorious geography and a high quality of life. Property here offers particularly good value for money right now, says **Fleur Kinson...**

Le Marche's fame and reputation has gone from strength to strength over the last dozen years or so. Once quite unfamiliar to non-Italians, this attractive region that makes up the shapely calf muscle on the leg of Italy has grown into one of the most desirable places for foreign buyers to secure themselves a rural bolthole. And thankfully, because of how the international financial climate has progressed during Le Marche's climb to popularity, property prices here are still surprisingly reasonable. In fact, they represent excellent value for money – especially at the moment with prices still recovering from the recent market-slump and a weak euro conferring great advantage on buyers in pounds and dollars.

So what are the charms of the place? Well, there's geography for a start. Few corners of the world can offer quite such a variety of lovely landscapes across a relatively small area. Lapped by the warm, shallow Adriatic, Le Marche's eastern edge is a long line of honey-gold beaches – a high proportion of which have been awarded the EU Blue Flag for cleanliness. Step back from the seaside and the landscape buckles into green and gold hills – a tidy, well-proportioned sort of landscape, where soft rises in the land are crowned with ancient, well-kept towns and villages. Move towards the region's western

border, and the gentle hills cede to steeper, wooded mountains. Wonderful hiking routes offer mighty vistas and small ski-resorts encourage winter fun.

But physical attractiveness isn't Le Marche's only appeal. The region is culturally beguiling, too. Like its neighbours Tuscany and Umbria, Le Marche enjoys the distinctive feel of central Italy. It's rural yet prosperous, orderly yet relaxed. The population density is low, the crime rate very low, and the sense of community strong. Friendly locals ensure you'll meet with a warm welcome.

Settlements might be small, but they have a lively calendar of events and festivals that bring people together. The region's food and drink are superb, the pace of life is healthy and sustainable, and there's an all-round sky-high quality of life to enjoy.

MARKET EVOLUTION

Le Marche first started attracting foreign buyers as a cheap alternative to its neighbouring regions, Tuscany and Umbria. Early buyers noticed that it offered much of the geographical beauty, fine buildings and civilised delights of those places, but with properties at much smaller cost. Rural houses needing restoration were especially popular, and there are today many fine country homes available which have already been lovingly restored as well as tumbledown properties ripe for restoration. As ➤



Ancona, capital
of Le Marche



*For rural properties especially,
Le Marche is very popular*



CASA VITTORIA

Type of property House

Number of bedrooms 3-5

Price €439,000

Location Santa Vittoria in Matenano

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Type of property House

Number of bedrooms 3

Price €439,000

Location Tolentino

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Serra San Quirico, on the road to Perugia

Le Marche became better known, its property prices rose a fair bit, but the international financial crisis of 2008 onwards caused a drop in overseas buyer numbers and a subsequent plateauing of prices and, in real terms, slight lowering. Mostly this was a matter of increased negotiability on asking prices. (Note that Italian real estate is remarkably stable when it comes to price fluctuations, and destabilising sudden 'booms' and 'busts' are extremely rare. This is one of the things that make Italian property such a safe

confidence is bringing many players back into the market and I don't see this changing for a while. This is good news if you are selling, and even better news if you are buying in a strong, non-euro currency. Value for money for such buyers hasn't been this good since 2006."

So what kind of prices are you likely to find people asking in Le Marche today? Well, old ruins in the countryside needing full restoration can ask as little as €50,000, and you can find quite large ones commanding great views

In 2015 there were more buyers from the UK and a big influx from the USA

place to put your money, as far as that can be said about anything.)

So what's the current state of the market and where might it be going now? Kevin L. Gibney of PropertyForSaleMarche.com notes that, "The market has chugged along on a fairly stable basis for a few years, with houses selling for 5 to 10 per cent off asking prices. Now we're seeing some confidence taking hold on the selling side."

Jane Smith of Magic Marche has also noted recent improvement: "The market has really strengthened through 2015," she says. "There were more buyers from the UK and a big influx from the USA – courtesy of the advantageous exchange rate against the euro for both these nations. Global

for about €90,000. Similarly, a fully-restored apartment in a village might ask as much: €60,000-€90,000. For between €100,000 and €200,000, you could consider a standing house to complete or restore, a small country cottage or a seaside apartment. For €250,000 to €400,000, you might get a beautifully restored three-bedroom farmhouse with a pool, a large townhouse or a villa on the coast.

WHERE TO BUY

Location is always a big factor in property prices, and homes in Le Marche are no exception. Some parts of the region are, of course, cheaper than others. As you might expect, the least expensive areas are the

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CASA POESIA

Type of property **House**

Number of bedrooms **3-4**

Price **€499,000**

Location **Recanati**

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IL BORGETTI

Type of property **Estate of two farmhouses**

Price **€1,100,000**

Location **Sarnano**

Contact **Marche Property Net** info@marchepropertynet.com

☎ +39 339 101 9042 www.marchepropertynet.com

"Il Borgetti" consists of two restored farmhouses with views of the Sibillini Mountains, fields, hills and medieval hilltop villages. They stand close to each other in an utterly tranquil position, surrounded by 30 acres of gardens, fields, timberland and fruit trees. One villa, Casa della Marchesa, is probably 18th century and even has its own chapel! The rooms have traditional wooden beam ceilings and terracotta tiled floors. You enter through old wooden doors into a hall. On the ground floor is a large living and an open fire. Casa Luisa is probably 19th century. It is in the traditional brick -built style with wooden beamed rooms and a mixture of terracotta and parquet flooring. There is a huge pool measuring 14x6m with terraces, sun lounges and wonderful views. There are no other houses around and yet it is only 10 minutes' drive to medieval Sarnano.



The region becomes increasingly mountainous as you travel inland

The Sibillini Mountains are especially attractive and have beguiled quite a few foreign buyers

more remote and mountainous ones, because they are harder to access and generally offer less proximity to shops and services.

"Someone who seeks solitude can make a very good deal," as Kevin Gibney points out. On the subject of mountains, do note that the Sibillini Mountains area in the southwestern corner of Le Marche is especially

attractive and has beguiled quite a few foreign buyers over the last dozen years.

Le Marche's priciest area is its seaside and anywhere within a dozen miles or so of the sea. Here you'll have buyer-competition from Marchigiani themselves, second-home-seekers from big Italian cities, and of course fellow northern



European nationalities such as Norwegians and Germans. Property prices are roughly 10 per cent higher on the coast and its immediate hinterland than they are further inland. Holiday rental prospects are at their best in coastal areas, however, and you might find that that can mitigate some of your expense.

To maximise value for money, and get an accessible home for a good price, you might want to consider the large 'Goldilocks' zone that lies neither too close to the sea nor too close to the mountains. This area has the added advantage of putting both kinds of landscape within easy reach, of course. And the holiday rental prospects in such areas are good. Kevin Gibney recommends anywhere between 10 and 30 miles from the sea. "For example, in the provinces of Macerato and Fermo," he says, "you get good value, there's a good range of choice, and you get all Le Marche has to offer in terms of access to sea and mountains."

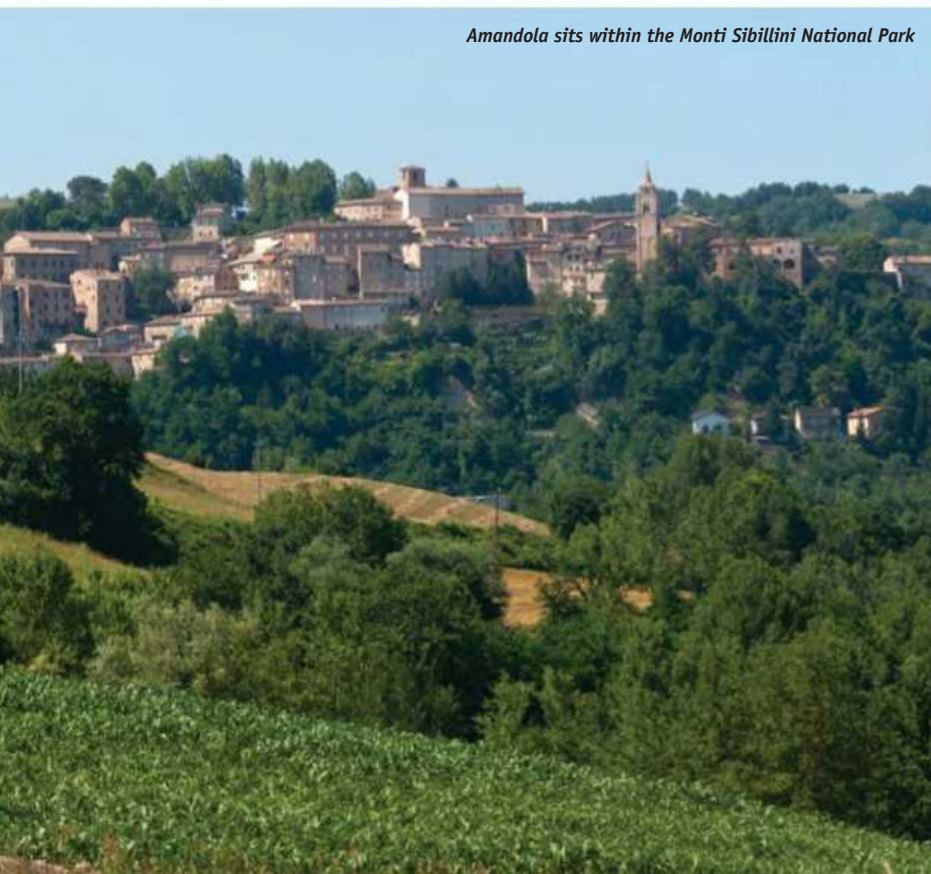
RENEW, RESTORE, REBUILD?

When it first arrived on the foreign-property-buyer scene, Le Marche held a particular appeal to those who wanted to restore an old tumbledown home in Italy. The

region had lots of old, abandoned rural properties ripe for conversion into bespoke country idylls with glorious views. With the passing of the years, many of those properties were beautifully restored by foreign buyers and have now come onto the market as fully habitable homes. Thus Le Marche offers today's buyer not only an abundance of old country properties to restore but also an abundance of ready-restored homes to enjoy straight away.

Only you can know how much or how little restoration you want to undertake. If you don't want to undertake any, but still want an old property full of character, then consider a ready-restored home. These often represent very good value for money in Le Marche these days. However, if what you really want is to bring an old, neglected home back from the dead and to imprint your own taste and requirements on it, then consider something on the wide spectrum of 'needing restoration' – which can range from total ruins that need to be knocked down and rebuilt from original materials to standing houses that require only modest work. Let's look in closer detail at the kind of projects you might opt for, and the pros and cons of each type. ➤

Amandola sits within the Monti Sibillini National Park



CASALE MADONNA DEI PRATI

Type of property **Country house**

Number of bedrooms **2**

Price **€240,000**

Location **Mogliano**

Contact **Marche Property Net** info@marchepropertynet.com

☎ +39 339 101 9042 www.marchepropertynet.com

This Casale is a typical charming and rustic Marchigiani Country house. The garden of circa 1,000sqm has been completely fenced and there is a private pool of 7 by 5 metres. The total amount of land, included in the price, is 2 hectares. It is located in the countryside, peacefully immersed in the nature but at the same time close to the centre of the medieval town of Mogliano. Most of the rooms are on the first floor; this was typical a lay-out for a farmhouse in Le Marche. So, on the first floor is a large living kitchen room with a traditional fireplace. Also on this floor, is a double bedroom with a bathroom. On the second floor, the attic, is another large bedroom currently with three single beds. On the ground floor is a second large living-kitchen room including a traditional wood-fuelled oven. In front of the house is a beautiful stonewalled courtyard with barbecue.



ROSSO CONERO

Type of property **Apartment**

Number of bedrooms **2**

Price **€190,000**

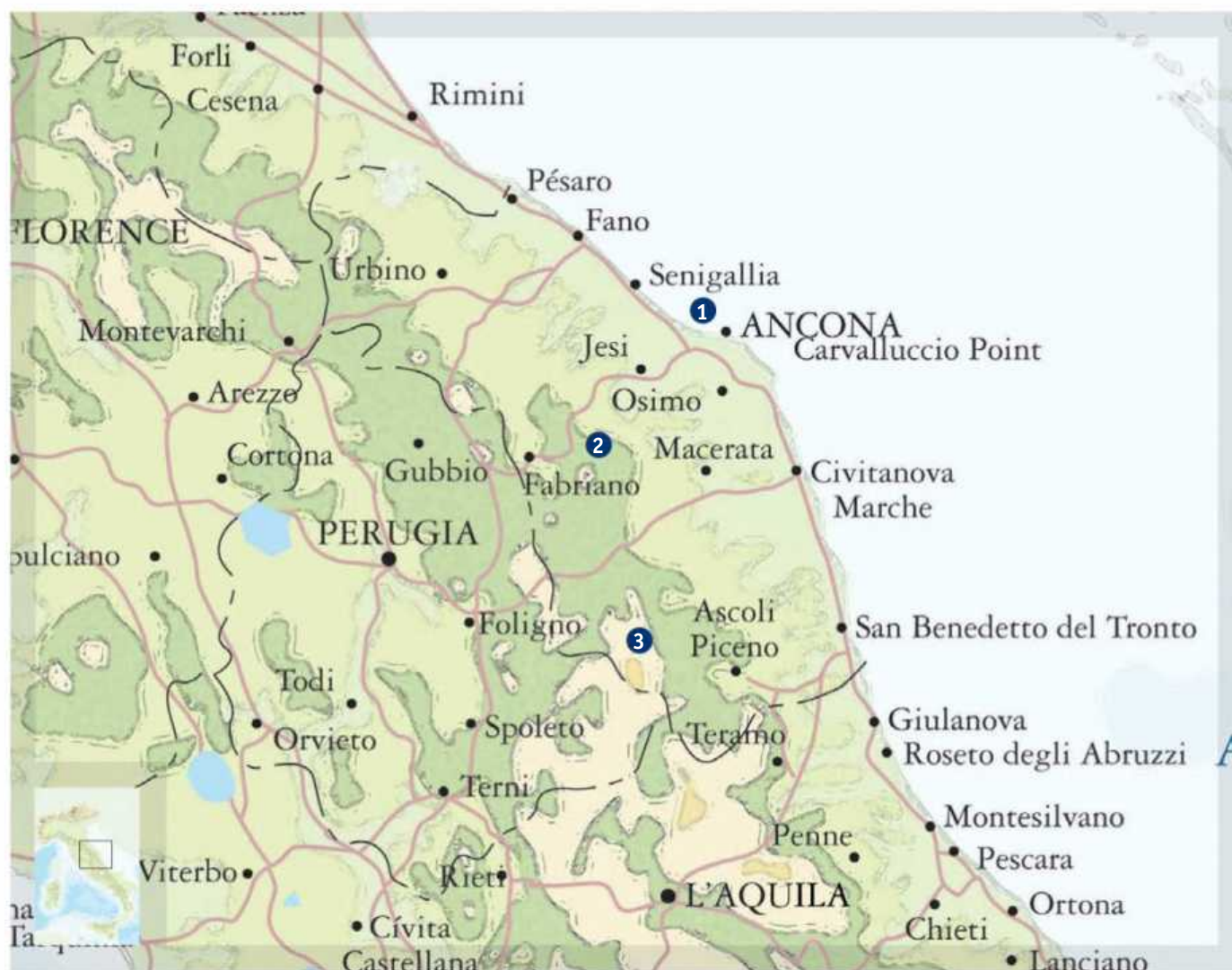
Location **Loro Piceno**

Contact **Marche Property Net** info@marchepropertynet.com

☎ +39 339 101 9042 www.marchepropertynet.com

This apartment has an open living/dining area with open plan kitchen, plus two double/twin bedrooms with bathroom, on 76sqm. The garden is circa 475sqm. Rosso Conero is part of Azienda Mastrocola, which is situated on a site with views over the Marchigiana Hills with the Sibillini mountain range behind. There is a shared swimming pool of 18 by 5m. The old Roman city of Loro Piceno is less than 3km from Azienda Mastrocola. Loro Piceno has two of the region's best restaurants, one of which is listed in the Michelin Guide. Market days and local festas abound in the town and nearby villages, with a good choice of shopping and cafés in town.

LE MARCHE REGIONAL GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

Le Marche lies on the eastern side of Italy, east of Umbria, between majestic mountains and inviting sea. The region is split into five provinces: Pesaro-Urbino, Ancona, Macerata, Ascoli Piceno and the recently constituted Fermo. Its proximity to both mountains and sea makes it very appealing to prospective homebuyers. The Adriatic coastline stretches some 180km and includes some of the best Italian Blue Flag beaches, while the steep eastern slopes of Italy's mountainous backbone, the Apennines, includes the stunning Monti Sibillini in the south. The main *autostrada*, the A14, and the state highway SS16 run swiftly along the coast, but further

inland they are slower as they weave up and down the hills between towns. The regular intercity train connections at Ancona link with Bologna and Rome. Ancona is also the site of Le Marche's international airport at Falconara, which is served by Ryanair from Stansted.

Le Marche boasts 13 protected areas, forests and nature reserves – including the majestic Monti Sibillini – and the National Park at Monte Conero on the coast near Ancona. Historically, Le Marche has a remarkable historical heritage too, with its medieval hilltop towns and villages and more than 30 significant archaeological sites and 200 Romanesque churches, as well as beautiful Renaissance city of Urbino.

THE COAST

① The coast of Le Marche stretches from Pesaro to San Benedetto del Tronto, past stretches of sandy beach and clean blue water and numerous small seaside towns and villages. The region can boast one of the highest number of Blue Flag beaches of any region in Italy. Ancona sits almost half way down the coast and is the administrative capital, and a busy port. With its Greek heritage there are many interesting styles of architecture. A lot of the coastal resorts are relatively small and retain a certain old-fashioned charm. The largest seaside resort is Pesaro, in the north, which is bursting with good shops and restaurants. Famous

for being the birthplace of Gioachino Rossini, the town has an annual Opera Festival. Senigallia, a little further south, is known as the 'Velvet Beach' with its 13km of soft, golden sand. The Conero Riviera offers the jewel of Portonovo with its Napoleonic fort, idyllic Sirolo and its spectacular golf course, and the Liberty-style architecture of Porto San Giorgio. Continue down the coast for Pedaso – which hosts a famous mussel festival – Cupra Marittima and its imposing castle, and Grottamare with its medieval old town. Finally you come to San Benedetto del Tronto, the second largest resort after Pesaro, with its coveted Blue Flag. The fishing port is very busy in the summer with its pretty promenades and vibrant nightlife. The coast might be expensive for property, but it's easy to get there from inland towns, so you won't miss out if you can't afford a home in a coastal resort.

INLAND

② Move inland from the coast and you will find the rolling hills and open fields of farming country, a peaceful landscape punctuated by pretty hilltop towns and gentle valleys. The quieter environment and slower pace of life make this a popular area for British buyers. One of the region's most eminent cities is Urbino. It rivals Florence for cultural significance and the more compact, bustling city has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Further south, the hill town of Macerata boasts one of Europe's most outstanding outdoor theatres, the Arena Sferisterio, built in the 19th century to resemble an ancient Roman arena. The Stagione Lirica musical festival is held here every summer.

Close to the border with Abruzzo, the ancient town of Ascoli Piceno takes its name from the Picene tribe, who were conquered by the Romans in 89BC. The city was once a stop on the *via salaria* (the salt route) from Rome, but now enjoys a quieter existence. With one of the most beautiful marble-paved *piazze* in Italy, and a wealth of medieval architecture, there's plenty to enjoy. Many other villages dot the

landscape, including Arcevia (to west of Ancona) perched on the foothills and surrounded by historic castles; Offida in the south with its unusual triangular piazza and memorable Vin Santo; and medieval Jesi, near Ancona, with its castle, cobbled streets and famous Verdicchio wines.

THE MOUNTAINS

③ The Monti Sibillini National Park was created in 1993 when 700 square kilometres of mountainous wilderness was set aside as a site of outstanding natural beauty. Rising to more than 2,000m high, this is a popular destination for naturalists, skiers in winter and walkers in the summer. The mountains form the border with Umbria to the west and the highest peak is Mount Vettore, at 2,476m. The area is dotted with medieval towns and criss-crossed with walking trails. There is shelter at the network of *rifugi* (mountain huts) across the range and all the maps and guides you need to plan your routes can be found at the Casa del Parco visitor centres. Popular nearby towns include Amandola with stunning views of the mountains, and Force, famed for its artisans and wrought iron work.



Macerata is popular with tourists and home-buyers alike



The stunning Sibillini Mountains in all their glory



The coastal town of Numana

➤ The advantages of ready-restored houses are obvious: you can move in straight away, and there's no further expense on building work for you to worry about. On the downside, you have to accept the previous owner's

elements, energy systems, damp-proofing and earthquake-proofing, but an externally very traditional appearance. The downside for some people is the time this takes – typically one to two years. Whether

for the preservation of architectural character and period details, and will take months rather than years to finish. Note that there are also some structurally-restored houses requiring finishing work. Typically

Buyers seeking to imprint their taste on a property without entirely rebuilding it should consider a standing house to restore

ideas for how the house should look and function. Sure, you can change the décor and update things like the kitchen and bathroom fittings, but you're unlikely to re-form the structure, layout or internal systems of the house – as you might with a home needing a lot of restoration.

At the opposite end of the scale is the total ruin, which you can demolish and completely rebuild. The advantages of this are that you can completely customise the property to your requirements, and get great creative satisfaction. You can end up with a house that has state-of-the-art structural

or not it's cheaper or more expensive to do a full restoration project like this compared to a property needing less or no work is a moot point. Much depends on the individual property in question.

Buyers seeking to imprint their taste on a property without rebuilding should consider purchasing a standing house to restore. Such properties are still upright and the building work required just reinforces the structure, changes the layout where possible, and installs new plumbing, heating, electrics and damp-proofing. Such houses allow

these will have been re-built from a ruin and sold with all the major structural elements completed. The rigours of planning approvals and heavy construction work are already complete and you will be able to move on to enjoyable things such as deciding room divisions and choosing décor. ■

USEFUL CONTACTS

www.appassionata.com
www.magicmarche.com
www.marchepropertynet.com
www.PropertyForSaleMarche.com

Skip and Molly bought a seaside flat for holiday visits

Photograph courtesy of Skip and Molly Brunswick



OUR LIFE IN LE MARCHE

Skip and Molly Brunswick from Massachusetts own a one-bedroom apartment in a village near the sea. They spend Christmas and summer there every year. What drew them to Italy, and to Le Marche in particular? “My grandparents were from Le Marche,” Molly explains, “and after my father died my mother decided to move back to where her parents came from. They had taught her Italian as a child, so she knew she wouldn’t have to struggle too much with the language. She hated the cold New England winters, and loved the idea of living in a warmer part of the world where older people were treated well and considered an important part of the community. Skip knew that I’d miss her terribly when she moved so far away, and so we decided to buy a tiny place of our own near her so we could visit whenever we wanted. We’re both teachers, so we have long summer breaks to travel in.

“The apartment is half of a little house in a village about a dozen miles from the sea. Senigallia is the nearest beach resort to us. It’s a cute old house that someone very beautifully restored and redecorated about ten years ago. There are exposed wooden beams overhead, and even a stone fireplace – which we love to sit beside in the winter drinking prosecco. As Americans, it tickles us to think that this building is older than our whole country! My mom lives in the same village, a few streets away, and we love to hang out at her house. She has a tiny roof terrace where there are amazing views of the coast.

“It’s obvious to us that my mom has a much better quality of life here in Le Marche than she did back home. This is a much more relaxed and easy-going place than Boston. She’s got fresh air, lots of sunshine, great food, and good friends. There’s always something going on in the village – some festival or gathering, or just the evening promenade-about-town that Italians like to do. It’s impossible to be lonely here, whatever age you are. Skip and I are definitely thinking about moving here permanently when we retire – to a bigger house further out in the country, perhaps.

“We love Le Marche. There’s so much to do. The roads are good and it’s easy to get around. We do a lot of swimming and sunbathing in the summer, but we also like to head off into the mountains and hike. In the winter, we even ski up there. Rome isn’t too far away for a day trip, and there are lots of other interesting places in easy reach – Perugia, Assisi, San Marino, even Florence. Le Marche is simply a great place to be.”



FRACTIONAL OWNERSHIP IN CASA TRE ARCHI

Type of property **Town house**

Number of bedrooms **3**

Price **from £70,000 for a 1/10th (5 weeks’) share**

Location **Petricoli**

Contact **India Hobbs-Mauger, Appassionata Ltd**

ifh@appassionata.com ☎ +39 3315 413225

www.appassionata.com

Casa Tre Archi is a 210sqm, 3-bedroom town house attached to the ancient turrets and entrance arches of the charming medieval town of Petritoli. There are three levels of outside space, including a stunning 50sqm roof terrace with sea views, 3 modern bathrooms, beamed ceilings, central heating, plus travertine and terracotta flooring throughout. Elegant Italian living for those who want something a little different, and don’t want to get the car out each time they go the shops or a restaurant, but at just a 20-minute drive away from blue flag beaches, you get the best of both worlds.



VILLA LUPO

Type of property **Restored farmhouse**

Number of bedrooms **5**

Price **€575,000**

Location **Morrovalle near Macerata**

Contact **Magic Marche jane@magicmarche.com**

☎ +39 331 381 9509 www.magicmarche.com

A beautifully restored, four bedroom farmhouse situated within an area of spectacular rolling countryside. This property has been restored to a high standard and exudes quality. Inside there are beams and stone flooring but the interior is also light and modern. There are 5 bedrooms, 3 luxury bathrooms, two spacious porticos. Outside there is a studio apartment/office and a swimming pool all set within a tranquil, private and mature garden with many fruit trees and spectacular views.

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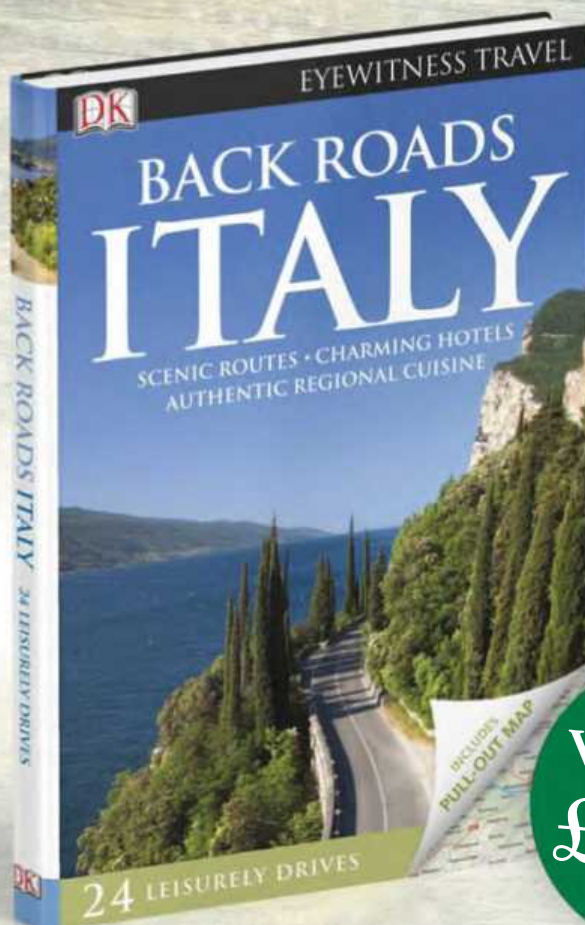
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Aeneas Silvius

As Pope, his attempts to unite the Christian rulers against Ottoman advances failed, but he had success at church reform.

Were I to ask you to name a poet of long ago, who spent his early life as an amorous and lustful rake, who wrote verses celebrating sensuous pleasure, and who in mid-life became a devout and sober preacher, and a high official of his church, who would you guess? John Donne? An excellent choice: Donne, who eventually became Dean of St Paul's, wrote memorably of both the sacred and the profane.

This is a column about Italian culture, though, so I have in mind another remarkable man, Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini. He was born in 1405 in the village of Corsignano, in the Val d'Orcia of Tuscany. His parents were exiled Siennese, but at age 18 Aeneas left to attend the University of Siena. His learning, charming manner, and facile pen led him to positions as secretary and emissary of several prominent men, particularly high members of the clergy. One was Cardinal Albergati, Bishop of Bologna, who sent him, in 1435, on a secret mission to Scotland. (Its purpose is still a secret today.)

The voyage across the North Sea was a violent one. Aeneas vowed that, if he survived, he would walk barefoot to the nearest shrine of Our Lady. When the ship landed at Dunbar, Aeneas walked ten miles barefoot, through ice and snow, to Whitekirk. In his autobiographical *Commentaries*, he described the Scotland of 1435: "It is utterly unlike the country we inhabit, being rude, uncultivated, and unvisited by the winter sun..." And, as for the people: "The men are short and brave; the women fair, charming, and easily won." He had a child with a Scottish woman, but the baby died in infancy.

Back in "civilized" Europe, Aeneas was involved in conflicts between reformers and recalcitrant Popes, became a diplomat, and wrote spicy poetry that was circulated among his many friends. He became a secretary to the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick III, who named him Imperial Poet Laureate. He





Aeneas addresses King James I of Scotland



Aeneas arranges the marriage of Frederick III to Eleanor of Aragon

wrote an “erotic” novel called *The Tale of Two Lovers* for a noble client. (I’ve read it. *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* it’s not.)

But his profligate life began to weigh on him. He wrote to a friend: “We are older, the day of our death draws near, and now we must consider not how to live, but how to die... For me, I have sinned enough, and too much.” He was 40 years old.

For the next decade, he worked tirelessly as a diplomat, resolving conflicts between Pope Eugene IV and the German princes who had supported the Antipope Felix V. He took holy orders in 1446, became a bishop, and held several other ecclesiastical posts over the years, all the while negotiating between competing church factions. When Pope Calixtus III died in 1458, Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini became Pope Pius II.

As Pope, his attempts to unite the

squabbling Christian rulers against Ottoman advances into Europe failed, but he had success at church reform. He became a patron of the arts. He commissioned the architect Bernardo Rossellino to create an “ideal city” from his hometown, Corsignano, and renamed it Pienza. And in Siena’s Duomo, Pinturicchio’s frescoes, based on the *Commentaries*, tell Aeneas’ story in scenes as colourful as the man himself. ■



ABOUT THE WRITER

JOE GARTMAN is a freelance writer based in Utah. A passionate amateur of art and history, and an avid traveller, he spends much time in Italy.

Photography © Pat Gartman, details of Pinturicchio’s frescoes in Siena’s Duomo



Clockwise from top left: Woman walking dog, plus free-range goat; welcome to Triora; view of the village from above; beware of the witch; flag of Triora, depicting Cerberus; walking in the mountains; cemetery above the village; shade plants decorating a street



48 HOURS IN...

Triora

Not far from the border with France, in the Province of Imperia, stands a beautiful village with a rich history.

Jane Keightley climbs into the Ligurian Hills...

Triora is famous in Italy for the witch trials which were held here in the 16th century, but beyond this it has a remarkably rich and varied history for a remote mountain village some 25km from the sea. Situated in the highest valley in Liguria, and not far from the French border, it is worth visiting for its setting alone. It is a member of the Touring Club Italiano's "Orange Flag" club, which means it is one of best places in Italy to visit. Apart from its intriguing history it is a magnificent area for walking.

I was staying in Triora and I soon realised what a unique place it was. Perched up high, the village seems to tumble down the mountainside. Once you enter the village you discover a maze of dark, atmospheric alleys. To reach these you must begin in Corso Italia, on the northern edge, where there are places to park and where the buses from Taggia and San Remo arrive. From here onwards the town is closed to traffic – cars would not fit in the narrow streets and alleyways.

From Corso Italia you arrive in Via Roma, which is the village's main street and as you sit in the café here you can watch all the comings and goings of the village. Most of the villages shops and its only restaurant are here plus the Tourist Information Office and the fascinating Witch Museum.

At the beginning of Via Roma there is a lane which you can follow up to the ruins of Triora's castle. Further up the hill is the cemetery, which ➤



WHAT TO SEE AND DO

THE CARUGI 1

Centro Storico

These are the steep and narrow cobbled streets that run through the old village centre.

SANT'AGOSTINO 2

Via Sant'Agostino

The 17th century Sant'Agostino Church is home to the Madonna della Misericordia (Our Lady of Mercy), which was carved in 1841. Every year, during the procession of the Mount, the residents carry the statue on their shoulders through the town in fulfilment of an ancient vow linked to a plague of locusts.

SAN BERNARDINO 3

This is a pretty little church off the main road going out of the village towards Molini di Triora. It is famous for its many medieval frescoes of the school of Canavesio.

LA COLLEGIATA DI NOSTRA

SIGNORA ASSUNTA 4

Centro Storico

Home to *The Baptism of Christ*, painted in 1397 by Sienese painter Taddeo di Bartolo.

ORATORIO DI SAN GIOVANNI BATTISTA 5

Strade Provinciale 89

This houses some valuable paintings and a monumental wooden altar made in 1690.

THE CABOTINA 6

La Colla

The Cabotina is located behind a mysterious place called La Colla. According to local legend this is where witches gathered to perform their sinister rituals.

ETHNOGRAPHIC & WITCHCRAFT MUSEUM 7

Corso Italia, 1

☎ +39 0184 94477

info@museotriora.it

www.museotriora.it

This museum houses a collection of artefacts and documents which give a good insight into the local history and culture. Part of it is dedicated to fauna, rural life and historic tools but the most interesting section is the one dedicated to witchcraft.

THE HANBURY BOTANICAL GARDENS 8

Corso MonteCarlo, 43 – La Mortola

☎ +39 0184 229507

www.giardinihanbury.com

These beautiful gardens are well worth a visit. Even if you are not into botany it is a wonderful place for a peaceful walk and when you reach the sea there is a little café where you can sit down and have a rest before you climb back up the hill.

DAY TRIP TO THE MOUNTAINS 9

☎ +33 066 384 4105

☎ +39 360 6483 6082

Mare.e.monti@hotmail.fr

With guide Fabien Arteto.



It is worth climbing high above the village

DON'T MISS

LA STRIGORA

La Strigora is a local festival held in August dedicate to witches, with theatrical shows, music and stalls with local specialty products.

occupies an area which was once a lookout and the site of executions. Nowadays it is a quiet, peaceful spot where you can admire the views for miles around and gaze down on the rooftops of Triora.

Everywhere you look in Triora there are witches to be seen. There is one on a sign welcoming you to the village, and there are various statues and weather vanes, and numerous witches astride their brooms in the souvenir shops.

friendly and offer samples for you to try.

Triora is situated above the valley of the River Argentina, which flows into the Mediterranean Sea at Arma di Taggia on the western Italian Riviera. The road from the coast winds higher and higher until eventually you reach Molini di Triora, where there is a confluence of three rivers.

This is said to be where the name Triora comes from. In the old

Everywhere you look in Triora there are witches, on statues and weather vanes

Yet although the locals like to cash in on the history of their witch trials, Triora is about much more than just witches.

It is a walkers' paradise and the area is well known for its alpine flowers and butterflies. You can buy books and maps about local walks in the shops in Triora and find lovely local food for picnics.

The local sheep's cheese, Brusso, is wonderful and the staff are very

Ligurian dialect, *tria ora* (in Italian, *tre gole*) means 'three throats', or three sources of water.

A different story claims that the name derives from the three mouths of Cerberus, the three-headed dog that guards the gates of the underworld. You can find representations of this mythical creature on the flag of Triora and in a paved representation in the centre of Piazza Reggio.



Witch, with broom



Cackling witch



The old bread oven



San Bernardino Church

The most famous part of Triora's history is that of the witch trials held here from 1587 to 1589. In the 16th century Genoa was controlled by Spain, which still had the Inquisition, and when in 1587 Triora was gripped by famine and poverty they decided they would lay the blame on witchcraft.

It was believed that the witches gathered at a ruined house on the outskirts of the village, called the Cabotina. Four girls and a boy and 13 women were hauled before the local magistrates who organised a series of trials and torture sessions to determine their guilt. One of the women committed suicide by throwing herself out of a window and four others were executed.

In the end eight of them had their sentences revoked. You can find out more about this gruesome episode in Triora's history in the village museum, the Museo Regionale Etnografico e della Stregoneria. If you are there in August there is the witchcraft festival, and of course Halloween is taken very seriously here and is celebrated with a big event.

There are some fascinating little villages around Triora well worth exploring if you have the time. In nearby Creppo there was a local hero who hid two Jewish orphans during the Holocaust. This was a very brave thing to do as partisan activity was brutally punished by the Germans.

It is worth exploring all the narrow tunnels and alleyways of the village but I must admit that once it was dark I stuck to Via Roma and headed for the bar and the one and only restaurant to get my fill of the local specialities and wine. The restaurant serves very good food which is good as there is nowhere else to eat unless you go down the valley into Molini di Triora. The place mat at the restaurant is a map of Triora so while waiting for your food you can see where you were exploring earlier in the day.

I did a walk from Triora to Loreto, passing San Bernardino's Church, which has some lovely frescoes. I then carried on through beautiful countryside down towards the river.

When I finally got to the river, I rested my weary legs by sitting ➤

DON'T MISS

PANIFICIO ASPLANATO
The countryside around Triora is the only part of Liguria where wheat was grown on terraces on the side of the mountains. It is still famous for its wholemeal bread cooked in wood ovens on a bed of chestnut leaves. There is not much wheat production here now but pane di Triora is still baked at the Panificio Asplanato on Corso Italia.

WHERE TO STAY



OWNERS DIRECT

www.ownersdirect.com

I rented a house right in the centre of Triora with views to die for. Renting from Owners Direct is a great way of living like a local. The prices are reasonable and it's great to be able to talk through things with the owner when booking.

B&B TANA DELLE VOLPE 10

Largo Tamigni, 5

☎ +39 339 776 4198

info@latanidellevolpi.it

A comfortable B&B in the centre of the village. Breakfast is taken in the Caffè Ricci in the main piazza, which is run by the same people as the B&B. No credit/debit cards. Doubles from €90.

B&B STREGATTA 11

Via Camurata, 24

☎ +39 304 559 2494

lastregatta@tiscali.it

www.lastregatta.weebly.com

A smart and comfortable room with an en-suite bathroom and satellite TV. No credit or debit cards. Seventh night free. Double room from €70.

B&B TRIORA MEDIAVALE 12

Via Cria, 5

☎ +39 333 721 927

trioramediavale@gmail.com

trioramediavale.webs.com

Three en-suite rooms with great views. Free WiFi. Double rooms from €80.



WHERE TO EAT

**RISTORANTE TRATTORIA LORETO BAR** 13

Ponte di Loreto

☎ +39 0184 9409

Run by a mother and daughter, this *trattoria* is open all day from 8am until 10pm. It is just outside town, to the northwest of the village, but well within walking distance, if you have the energy. There is no menu, only a choice of two or three dishes of the day, but it is good local food.

€ €

L'ERBA GATTA 14

Via Roma 6, Triora

☎ +39 0184 94392

info@erbagatta.it

www.erbagatta.it

This is the only restaurant actually in the village, so it's pleasing to be able to report that it is good. The food is high quality and the staff are extremely friendly.

€ €

BAR I TUVI 15

Via Roma 5, Triora

☎ +39 333 983 1399

This is the bar on the main street where you can rest after your shopping and sit and watch all the comings and goings of Triora whilst enjoying a beer.

LA STREGA DI TRIORA 16

Corso Italia, 50

☎ +39 0184 94278

info@lastregaditriora.it

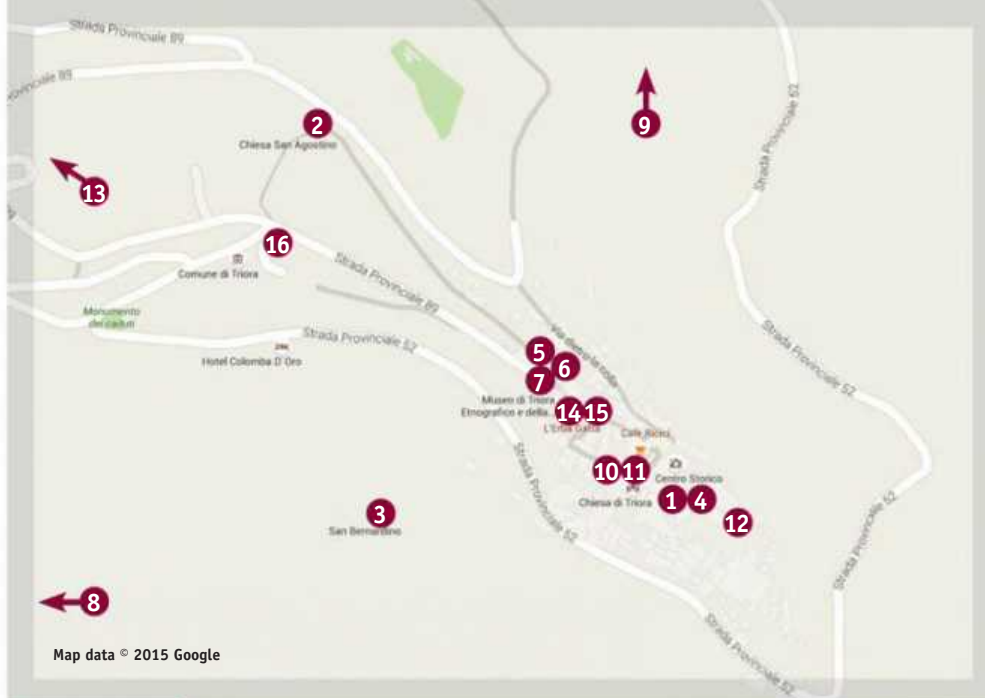
www.lastregaditriora.it

This is not actually a café or a restaurant but rather a shop that sells some wonderful local products that you can pack up for picnics in the hills.

€



Loreto trattoria



Map data © 2015 Google

DON'T MISS

TRIORA'S OTHER FESTIVALS

Between the witchcraft festival in August and Halloween at the end of October, Triora hosts a mushroom festival and a snail festival.

at the picnic table and enjoyed the tranquility of this leafy glade near the old bridge.

Climbing up to Loreto, I then found a small *trattoria* run by a mother and daughter. I treated myself to wild boar and chips (there is no menu – you take what comes) and a large beer after my walk.

The downside was that I still had to walk back to Triora but it was not too far and I passed the Witches' Fountain en route. Whilst in Loreto I admired the enormous bridge that stretches across the valley. Built in the 1960s it was at the time the highest and longest bridge in Europe, and a considerable feat of engineering.

If you have time it is worth a drive down to the coast to Ventimiglia to visit the Hanbury Gardens. These beautiful gardens are situated in 45 acres between Ventimiglia and the French border. The oldest botanical gardens on the Riviera, they were founded in 1867 by Sir Thomas Hanbury and his brother Daniel, who was a botanist.

Sir Thomas had made his fortune in the Far East and came here to recuperate from an illness and fell in love with the place. The gardens consist of a cultivated garden and the other half is left to grow naturally. Plants from all over the world grow well here sheltered by the mountains and enjoying the balmy weather of the Riviera.

A building called Palazzo Oregio had been built on this site on the remains of a Roman Villa. After Sir Thomas died the gardens

were cared for by his daughter-in-law until 1939 when they fell into decay and suffered much damage during the Second World War. You can still see bullet holes in some of the trees where the soldiers practised their shooting.

The property was sold to the Italian State in 1960 and then in 1987 was passed to the University of Genoa to care for. On a hot day it is a cool oasis of calm to wander round while you admire the selection of weird and wonderful plants from all over the world.

This area of Liguria is well worth visiting if you like somewhere where you can live like a local, use your Italian, and relax completely. ■

GETTING THERE

➤ BY PLANE

Triora is about 100km from Nice airport and 160km from Genoa airport. British Airways and Ryanair fly to Genoa and British Airways and easyJet fly to Nice.

➤ BY TRAIN

The railway runs all along the coast. Get off at Arma di Taggia and finish the rest of the journey to Triora by bus.

➤ BY CAR

Hiring a car is much the best way of getting around. To get to Triora by car follow the A10 (Autostrada dei Fiori, the motorway of flowers). Exit at Arma di Taggia (San Remo Est) and drive to Triora on the Provincial 548, which runs through the Argentina Valley. Tip: if you are self-catering don't forget to stop at the Carrefour supermarket in Arma to stock up on provisions. When you arrive in Triora there are free parking spaces on the outskirts and a place to unload at the entrance to the town, near the arches.

➤ KEY TO RESTAURANT PRICES (full meal per person, not including wine)

€ Up to €25

€ € €26-€50

€ € € More than €50



The restaurant at Loreto



Bananas at the Hanbury Gardens



Goat's cheese!



The River Argentina



The house at Hanbury Gardens



Moorish Mausoleum at the Hanbury Gardens

Renaissance portraits

The Renaissance portrait can be likened to the marketing of today – they were tools that wielded great political, diplomatic and social messages

Portraiture in the Renaissance period was big business. A portrait served to portray how the sitter wished to be perceived by the intended audience, which was not necessarily the reality. The Renaissance portrait can be likened to the marketing of today, where everything is planned and constructed in order to transmit a message the patron wished to convey. Portraits were tools that wielded great political, diplomatic and social messages. The successful portrait artist had to understand exactly what type of sentiment, atmosphere and psychological image his client wished their public to understand when they stood in front of the painting or sculpture. (This concept resonates more than ever in today's world of social media with Facebook and Instagram where the 'natural' photos posted are often anything but spontaneous.)

Let's take for example, the fabulous portrait of Eleonora of Toledo and her son Giovanni, finished in 1545 by Agnolo Bronzino, which hangs in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. This portrait was commissioned by Eleonora's husband, the Duke of Florence, Cosimo de' Medici, and was possibly destined to be given as a strategically planned gift to Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor and one of the most powerful men in Europe. The portrait might have been gifted to the Emperor via his First Minister, discerning art connoisseur Nicolas Perrenot de Granvelle, to whom Cosimo had already personally gifted Bronzino's *Lamentation of Christ*, which had been commissioned for Eleonora's private chapel in Florence. This painting is still in Besançon, where Granvelle ruled as suzerain.

Cosimo wished to be invited to join one of the most exclusive boys' clubs in Europe, the Order of the Golden Fleece... And who decided the membership to



Eleonora's portrait hangs in the Uffizi, but was probably intended as a gift to Charles V



Cosimo I de' Medici by Agnolo Bronzino

Bronzino [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons





*Eleonora di Toledo col figlio (with son)
Giovanni by Agnolo Bronzino*

the Order? None other than Charles V, the Sovereign of the Order... Cosimo had already commissioned an official portrait of his beloved wife a few years earlier from their court painter, Bronzino, and so it is interesting that he would commission another so soon. It is probable that this second portrait was indeed to be sent as a gift to Charles V, to be included in his portrait gallery. Why wouldn't he send his own portrait? Because it wasn't appropriate, he hadn't entered this circle yet. He was of inferior breeding to his wife and he had to plan his ascent carefully. Sending the portrait of his wife and second son was subtle, but the intention would have been understood. Eleonora already had one foot in the door, so to speak, and being married to Cosimo she indirectly represented the loyalty that her husband upheld to the Spanish and the Habsburg dynasty.

In this portrait Eleonora was the embodiment of the new official dynastic rule in Florence, after the change from being a republic. She is painted with her second son, Giovanni, which demonstrated her having secured the succession to the throne (already having two sons). She is represented in an aloof, detached manner, with an air of utter confidence which reflected the stability that had been brought to the new dukedom due to Cosimo's rule and their strong marriage alliance, after some decades of difficulty and instability. She has a stylised pomegranate, symbol of fecundity, woven into the exquisite fabric of her dress over the area of her belly and womb, which is in reference not only to the projected large family, but more importantly to the prosperity that Cosimo's rule, with the support of Charles V, will bring to Florence and, in turn, Cosimo's support of the Holy Roman Emperor.

We don't know if this portrait was ever sent to Charles V. However, it became the state image of Eleonora and was copied numerous times. And a few months after the completion of the portrait, Cosimo was elected a knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece. Then, five years later, Charles requested a portrait of Cosimo for his gallery. Cosimo had arrived. ■



ABOUT THE WRITER

FREYA MIDDLETON is a private tour guide and writer who lives in Florence, Tuscany. You can read her blog online or learn more about her tours at www.freyasflorence.com

Bronzino [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Photography © Freya Middleton unless stated

DISCOVER ITALIA!



Out of Mantua





Photography © Jon Palmer, unless stated

Leaving behind the cultural delights and creature comforts of Mantua, **Jon Palmer** sets off to explore the surrounding area by boat and bicycle...



Images, clockwise from top left: Boat ride at the Riserva Regionale Valli di Mincio; your correspondent at Bardolino a couple of years ago; lurking lotuses; cycling along a dike out of Brescello; detail from the Chamber of the Giants, Palazzo Te; sunset at Gualtieri, home town of the artist Antonio Ligabue; Palazzo Bentivoglio frescos, Gualtieri

Two years ago, in the early autumn of 2013, I went to Lake Garda (Bardolino, to be precise) on the invitation of Verona Garda Bike (www.veronagardabike.com) to see some of the cycling opportunities in that part of the world. (That's me on the right, looking pleased with myself.) I had a great time, as you may have read in these pages.

Some of that trip brought me into company with pretty serious downhill mountain bikers – young, fit, wearing lycra and not looking ridiculous while doing so – but other parts of it merely involved some leisurely flat-terrain rides between restaurants. One afternoon we went along the lake shore, stopping when we felt like it for gelato or coffee. On another morning we headed inland, southwards from Peschiera, along the River Mincio to Valeggio, where we arrived just in time for lunch. On another day we followed the Adige River from the hills behind Lazise down to Verona, where we again arrived conveniently in time for lunch, and then spent a leisurely afternoon pottering around town on our metal steeds, seeing the Arena, Juliet's House, all that.

You don't need to be wearing lycra for that sort of thing. You may need some of the padding they put in lycra shorts if you are going to be in the saddle all day, but I am of the point of view, as you may have surmised, that cycling is a good means of getting somewhere not too far away where you can have lunch. It need not be up any hills. And the afternoon's return leg need not be too energetic.

That's my kind of cycling. There are moments when I try to convince myself that I can still keep up with the kids on their crazy downhill escapades, but the truth is that I can't, and that if I tried I'd probably fall off and hurt myself. Badly...

No. I want a nice, flat ride through pleasant, unchallenging terrain, avoiding roads wherever possible. And the best places to find that sort of cycling is along rivers, because the terrain is guaranteed to be flat. And the biggest river system in Italy (by far) is the Po.



The River Po is Italy's Mississippi. It's the main artery of a river system that, in a very real sense, defines modern Italy. All the water that flows southwards and eastwards out of the Alps (including that from the Mincio), all the water that flows northwards and eastwards out of the Appenines, it all flows into the Po.

The great river meanders, slow, grey and wide, across the plain of its valley, picking up tributaries right and left as it goes, before discharging huge quantities of water, via its delta, into the sea.

You will see it first at Turin. It feeds the canals of Milan. It passes Piacenza and Cremona before winding out of Lombardy at Mantua and describing the border between Emilia-Romagna and Veneto to its delta. And all along its course it enables agriculture, transport, industrialization...

THE MIGHTY PO

When the chance came this last autumn to resume my exploration of this area, this time a little further down the River Mincio, at Mantua and beyond, to the mighty Po itself, I had to take it. Even though I knew there wouldn't actually be that much cycling this time, I would at least be able to see what the terrain would be like for another two-wheeled adventure at some as yet undetermined time in the future.

I was also promised that there would be boats... Now, rivers are great for leisurely cycling, but the form of transport you really need if you are going to experience the river itself, rather than just use it as a guarantee of flat terrain, is a boat. Not a fancy cruise boat

WHERE TO EAT

GIALLOZUCCA

Corte dei Sogliari, 4 – Mantova

☎ +39 0376 222817

maurizio.lazzati@libero.it

www.giallozucca.it

Giallozucca means 'pumpkin yellow', as in 'the yellow you get in pumpkins' (as in orange, really, but don't let's get distracted, it's lunch time). I'm having pumpkin. It has to be in season, of course – this is a restaurant that sets its menu according to locally produced, seasonal recipes – but as I was there in the autumn, it was in season. I had my pumpkin-yellow pumpkin (a butternut squash in this case) in ravioli, and it tasted very sweet. I wondered if that was because of the sunshine – I grow butternut squash in England but it doesn't taste like that. Apparently that's not the secret though. What they do is they add crushed up amaretti biscuits to the roast pumpkin purée... Now there's an idea!

€ €

LA LOCANDA DELLE GRAZIE

Via S. Pio X, 2 – Grazie

☎ +39 0376 348038

Grazie means thank you, but it's also the name of a village just to the west of Mantua, next to the Riserva Regionale Valli del Mincio. And the village of Grazie has a Locanda, which you will find in your Michelin guide. You'll get pumpkin-yellow pumpkin ravioli here too, as well as other Mantuan specialties like *risotto al pilota* (pilau rice), pike (there are a lot of rivers and lakes round here, though the places where fish can be taken for the table are unfortunately limited these days because of pollution), and *sbrisolona* (a sort of polenta and almond flapjack). The lady of the house will come out and explain all this in an endearing melange of German, English and Italian. Somehow, you will understand her.

€ € €

RISTORANTE ALBERGO VILLA MONTANARINI

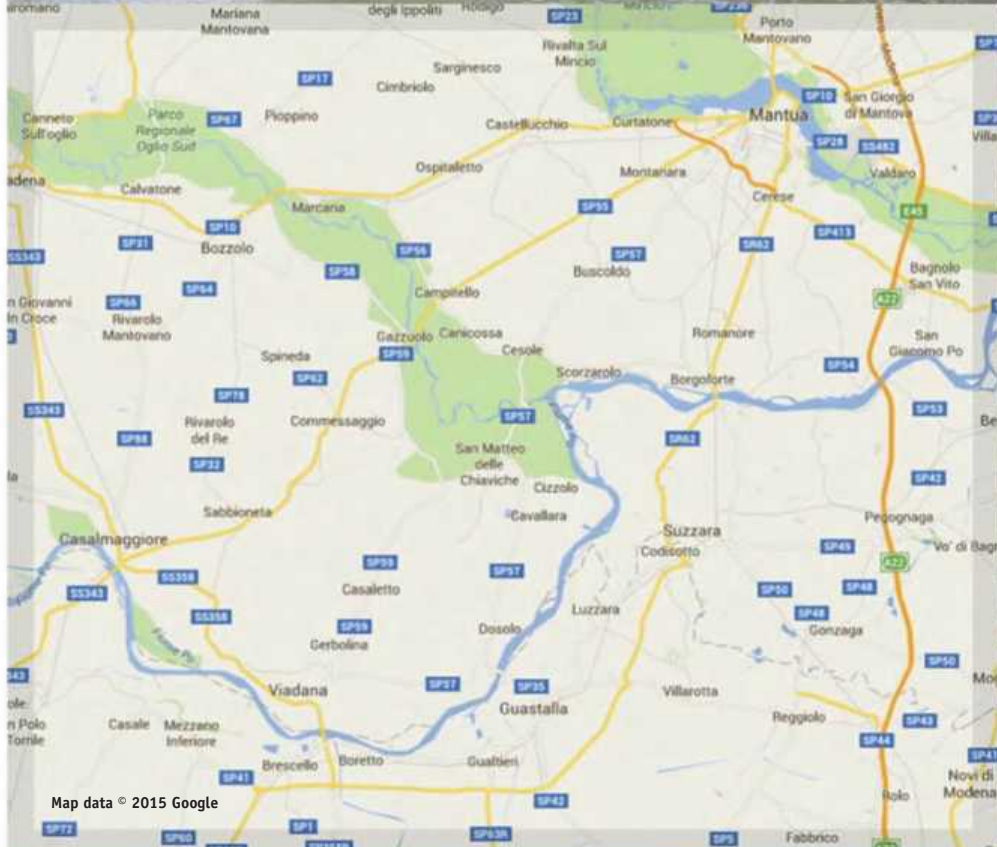
Via V. Mandelli, 29 – Villarotta di Luzzara

☎ +39 0522 820001

www.villamontanarini.com

We're heading south from Mantua now, in the direction of the balsamic vinegar producing town of Reggio Emilia. The Villa Montanarini is a hotel, though I didn't stay for the night so I can't comment on that, but if it's like the restaurant you won't go too far wrong. The décor has something of the 'posh gastro pub in the Cotswolds' look about it – homely, welcoming, nice without being twee. My advice would be to try the fish, and to avoid any argument over whether the best balsamic vinegar comes from Reggio Emilia or Modena.

€ € €





Images, clockwise from top left: Mooring on the Mincio; Mantua skyline from a distance; a car in Guastalla that I wanted to steal; the marriage of Cupid and Psyche, Palazzo Te; autochthonous lilies are under threat from the invasive lotus

with cocktails on deck and music and all that nonsense. Just a simple, functional tourist vessel that will get you where you want to go, and maybe offer you a little refreshment along the way if it happens to be that time of day. That's all the comfort you need. You see, rivers are lovely places to be, but they're not generally very pretty, especially when they haven't got a townscape to set them off to best effect, so we can afford to be prosaic in our approach.

Rivers (and the Po is no exception) do tend to be rather less romantic than they sound. The Mersey, the Thames and the Tyne have all had songs written about them, but go and stand on their banks, even on a beautiful sunny day, and they show themselves for what they are: amorphous grey flows of (often rather dirty) water. It is true that as they flow through our great cities they may define many iconic vistas, and this is also true in Italy – the Arno through Florence, the Tiber at Rome, the Po itself at Turin, the Mincio at Mantua and the Adige at Verona, on their way to the Po – but get away from the architecture of the city, back out into the countryside again, especially on a grey day, and the river is laid bare, shown up for what it is: a lot of grey water all going in the same direction.

And anyway, what is noticeable about the towns and villages of the Po is that they are nearly all built slightly away from the river, because the river does flood, a lot. Even



the larger towns and cities – Pavia, Piacenza, Cremona, Mantua and Ferrara – are actually sited just away from the river, on a tributary, or at a safe bend in its course. Even the great city of Turin is mostly built on its western bank.

DILLY-DALLYING

As it passes through, or rather around, Mantua, the River Mincio feeds the city's three lakes, the Superiore, the Mezzo and the Inferiore, before leaving town at the Riserva Regionale Vallazza, on its way to the Po. But it will dilly-dally on the way. We're going to take a direct route. We're heading southwest, in the direction of Parma, as far as Brescello.

This is the home of Don Camillo and Peppone – or at least it is the place where they made the films of Giovannino Guareschi's stories. If you don't know the stories of Don Camillo and Peppone, they concern a small town in post-war northern

THE INVASIVE LOTUS

Mantua is famous for its Palazzo Ducale and its Palazzo Te. But it's also famous, notorious, for being the site of one of the more spectacular floral disasters of the 20th century – the introduction of the invasive lotus. Any Australian readers, particularly those from Queensland, will be all too familiar with the 'Tale of the Cane Toad'. (Creature imported to devour a pest, ends up devouring everything but the pest and, into the bargain, breeds like nobody's business too. Now itself a pest.) Well this is a similar story, but with a plant.

It is 1920 and Italy is recovering from war. Lands have been won in Tyrol but food, even in the Po Valley, is scarce. Very scarce. Somebody has a bright idea: "In India and China they eat the lotus plant. The lotus would grow in our climate. We can feed the people. Just pop a few specimens in the Mincio in springtime and watch it thrive."

Well, thrive it did. A bit too much. In parts it has taken over the entire river. The autochthonous lilies, starved of light, cannot compete; the fauna cannot find room enough to breed and live. The lotus flower, which appears in summer, is very beautiful, but ecologically it's been a fiasco. And nobody eats the damn things anyway.



Lotuses, as far as the eye can see, and not one local recipe to use them in

VINEGAR COUNTRY

This, of course, is balsamic vinegar country. To the south of Mantua, on the road between Parma and Bologna, lie the towns of Reggio Emilia and Modena. Both towns, and the areas around them, have been producing balsamic vinegars since the Middle Ages, and both are protected by Denominazione di Origine legislation. Which is best? Well, this is a matter of great debate and you'll get a different answer depending on which town you are in. So I went to Novellara instead, where they consider their balsamic vinegar to be at least the equal of that either of their larger neighbours. Here you can take a guide tour of the *acetia comunale*, where the town's famous vinegar is aged. You will learn that this ageing process takes place in wooden barrels (the actual wood used varies, different woods lend different flavours to the vinegars). The barrels are stored in the attic. Balsamic vinegar, you are instructed, requires very different conditions from wine in its maturation. Vinegar needs heat, the heat from the summer sun beating down on the roof. This is not, therefore, the only house in the area where the attic is full of barrels of balsamic vinegar.



The Chairman of the local society will be your guide



Images, from top: An abandoned farmhouse on the cycling route through Boretto; no, it's not a petrol station – these pumps contain Lambrusco; the Peace in Po bar outside Guastalla, whence boats will return you to Mantua

Italy and the personal battles there between a priest, Don Camillo, and the mayor, Peppone. They are iconic.

If you do know Don Camillo and Peppone, you will know that this is backwater Italy. It's pleasant, and good cycling and boating country, but it's not packed with things to see and do. That really is the charm of it all though. There's a quaint museum here in Brescello with some of the props from the films, as well as the chance to buy all the souvenirs you might expect. But we don't have time for museums today. We're going to do what Don Camillo did. We're going to get on a bicycle and head slowly and gently back in the direction in which we came.

Following downstream we pass through the tiny communes of Boretto and Pieve Salicetto (which are not famous for anything – except that they too feature in the films of Don Camillo and Peppone – but which do, unusually, actually stand on the river's banks). Then we arrive at Gualtieri, which is famous for another reason: being the home town of Antonio Ligabue, one of the most important Italian artists of the 20th century.

He was quite a character, Ligabue, not the easiest of gentlemen to get along with by all accounts, and not especially liked by his fellow townsfolk while he was alive. They love him now though. He brings in tourists. (And he's been dead 50 years!) I was lucky enough to catch the end of a temporary exhibition of his work held in the Palazzo Bentivoglio (the town's big house) through 2015 to mark the passing

of the half century since his death. You've missed it now, but it was a real success, so they were hoping to be able to set up a permanent home for the paintings. That, if it happens, will be worth visiting.

BACK ON THE BIKE

After Gualtieri, you come to Guastalla, which is larger than Boretto or Pieve Salicetto, similar in size to Brescello and Gualtieri, but which, like Boretto and Pieve Salicetto, is famous for absolutely nothing. You might enjoy browsing through the street markets and just soaking up the atmosphere of small town life, but there isn't actually anything to do, except head off up to the river, which is about two miles away. Let's get back on the bike then.

Between Guastalla and the river there is, obviously, even less than there is in Guastalla – agricultural fields, and dykes between them to stop the river from flooding the fields when it breaks its banks. As you near the river you pass phalanxes of young black poplars, which thrive here, and which help stem the flow of water from the river into the farms with their vigorous root systems. (Yes, we are so deep into rural Italy now that things like organic flood defences actually start to become interesting!)

When you see the trees, you are near the river. At the river you will find the Peace in Po bar, which is where you can take refreshment (if it's open, which it wasn't) before catching a boat from the jetty back to Mantua, hopefully arriving just in time for lunch. ■

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€250,000-€500,000

VILLA TRULLO NOCE

5-bedroom property in Ceglie Messapica with easy access to pool, garden, terrace and private parking. Villa Trullo Noce is made out of two separate out buildings: one an ancient lamia with annexed 3-cone trullo offering 3 bedrooms, living room, kitchen, 2 bathrooms and veranda; the other a detached, modern-built villa offering open-plan kitchen, 2 bedrooms, bathroom and veranda. The property stands in a well-maintained garden with fruit trees set in the countryside between Martina Franca and Ceglie Messapica, as well as being within easy driving distance of the Adriatic and Ionian coasts. House 180sqm; land 5,000sqm. EPC: G. Price €350,000 Contact ☎ +39 0831 342930 info@pugliadream.com www.pugliadream.com



€100,000-€250,000

SPIAGGIABELLA

Ready to move in property for sale by the sea in Spiaggiabella near Lecce. Villa Valeria, the ideal holiday property, a few metres from sandy beaches, is made up of a kitchen, a bathroom, three bedrooms, two verandas and a patio hosting a storage room and some stairs leading to a roof terrace with spectacular sea views! This property is located at the end of a cul-de-sac with nice views of the neighbouring natural park. Villa Valeria is within metres of reach from bars, restaurants and beach clubs, as well as being a 15-minute drive from the picturesque city of Lecce and 30 minute from Brindisi international airport.

Price **€125,000** Contact ☎ **+39 0831 342930**
info@pugliadream.com www.pugliadream.com



€250,000-€500,000

MARTINA FRANCA

Spacious 5-bedroom typical Puglian masseria in the countryside of the Itria Valley equidistant from Martina Franca and Ceglie Messapica, 45km from Brindisi airport and 25km from the Adriatic and Ionian seas. The farmhouse, which is in need of renovation though with electricity and in good structural condition, is about 200sqm and consists of 10 rooms, many with vaulted ceilings in typical Puglian style. There are also some stables which could be renovated. The property stands in about 28 hectares (about 69 acres) of land with fig trees, oak trees and Mediterranean maquis. Energy Classification "G". Ref 3689.

Price **€350,000** Contact ☎ **01322 660 988**
www.casatravella.com



€100,000-€250,000

SELVA DI FASANO

Spacious, renovated 4-bed villa (joined at one corner to another property), part of a small development of detached villas on the hillside above Selva di Fasano, midway between Bari and Brindisi, with views to the Adriatic Sea less than 10km away. About 160sqm. Ground floor: living/dining room, kitchen area, double bedroom and shower room with bidet, basin and WC. First floor: lounge, fully fitted kitchen and exit onto covered veranda with summer kitchen, breakfast bar and pizza oven; 3 bedrooms, fully tiled bathroom. Externally, a covered balcony. The property benefits from a newly installed pellet-powered central heating system and sits in an extensively planted garden of about 250sqm. Ref 3814. Price **€220,000**

Contact ☎ **01322 660 988 www.casatravella.com**



€100,000-€250,000

OSTUNI

2 bed house and trullo in the countryside 5km from Ostuni and within striking distance of the sea and Brindisi airport. The total property provides about 150sqm of accommodation with the main house consisting of a living room, kitchen/dining room, 2 bedrooms and bathroom as well as a covered veranda. To the side of the villa is a trullo and lamia in excellent condition where you can create a further bedroom and bathroom. There is also the possibility to increase the size of the main building by 20 per cent if required and space to build a swimming pool. An excellent villa, close to amenities with possibilities to increase and create a holiday home for personal use or rental income. Ref 3826. Price just reduced **€180,000**

Contact ☎ **01322 660 988 www.casatravella.com**

DISCOVER ITALIA!

SECRET ITALY

With so much focus on tourism to Italy's more famous cities like Florence and Venice, an exploration of Assisi and its surroundings makes an interesting change. **Jane Keightley** travelled with Voyages Jules Verne on their Secret Italy package...

Assisi, birthplace of
St Francis and St Clare

I couldn't wait to be shown around the area by Roy, who already seemed like a knowledgeable old friend. I was looking forward to a week of adventures, and that is certainly what I got.

Below, inset: La
Basilica di San
Francesco ad Assisi;
la Piazza Grande,
Assisi

Most people have heard about Assisi, the birthplace of Saint Francis and one of the most visited places in the world. Despite the place heaving with tourists and pilgrims most days, in the early mornings and evenings there is a feeling of peace and tranquility and the locals can revert to a relatively normal life. A town that is twinned with Bethlehem, Santiago de Compostela and San Francisco is definitely going to be special place, and this place is.

I was staying in Assisi for a week, hosted by Roy Grant, who has lived in Assisi for 15 years. We were invited round to his house on the first night for prosecco and nibbles to find out what we had planned out for us. He had organised an exciting itinerary for us which was a great mixture of art, architecture and beautiful scenery, with a few wonderful meals thrown in for good measure. We were staying in an historic hotel right in the centre, enabling us to explore Assisi in our free time quite easily as well.

I couldn't wait to be shown around the area by Roy, who already seemed like a knowledgeable old friend. I was looking forward to a week of adventures and that is certainly what I got.

PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA

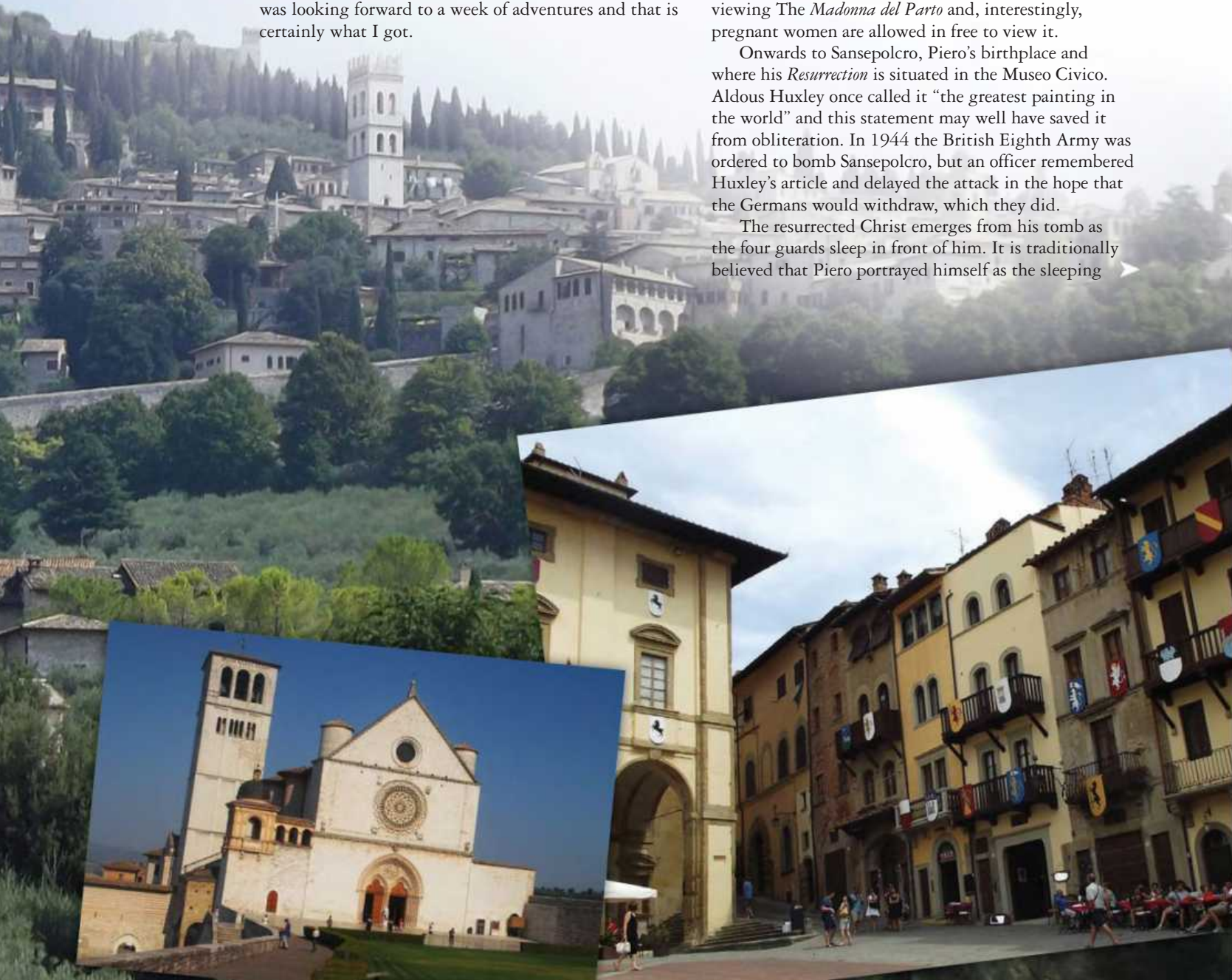
The first day dawned and off we all went, up early but very keen to get started. I had always wanted to do the Piero della Francesca Trail and loved the fact that we were going to visit Arezzo, Urbino, Monterchi and Sansepolcro, the homes of his best-known masterpieces.

Arezzo was our first stop and after exploring its old streets and the spectacular Piazza Grande we visited the Basilica of San Francesco. The famous frescoes of *The Legend of the True Cross* are situated in the choir of the Basilica. The story of The Legend of the True Cross is a long and complicated one and I was pleased we had a knowledgeable guide to explain it to us.

The next stop was Monterchi, a tiny little village and the home of Piero's *Madonna del Parto*, a depiction of the Madonna in her ninth month of pregnancy, in the pose of pregnant women the world over. In 1993 the fresco was moved from the cemetery chapel where it was painted and taken to an old primary school, where it was restored and where it remains. These rather lacklustre surroundings do not detract from the experience of viewing The *Madonna del Parto* and, interestingly, pregnant women are allowed in free to view it.

Onwards to Sansepolcro, Piero's birthplace and where his *Resurrection* is situated in the Museo Civico. Aldous Huxley once called it "the greatest painting in the world" and this statement may well have saved it from obliteration. In 1944 the British Eighth Army was ordered to bomb Sansepolcro, but an officer remembered Huxley's article and delayed the attack in the hope that the Germans would withdraw, which they did.

The resurrected Christ emerges from his tomb as the four guards sleep in front of him. It is traditionally believed that Piero portrayed himself as the sleeping





In every corner of Assisi there is a building connected with St Francis. The highlight of the day was definitely being shown round the Basilica by an American monk called Martin.

WHERE TO EAT AND STAY

TAVERNA DE L'ARCO

Via San Gregorio, 8 – Assisi

☎ +39 075 816689

info@tavernadelarco.it

www.tavernadelarco.it

A great restaurant offering something different and of better quality to the normal tourist fare.

TAVERNA DEI CONSOLI

Vicolo della Fortezza, 1

(Piazza del Comune) – Assisi

☎ 39 075 812516

info@tavernadeiconsoli.it

www.tavernadeiconsoli.it

This restaurant situated on the main piazza serves very good food. My favourite was the shallots done in balsamic vinegar. Try to get on the balcony overlooking the piazza.

HOTEL DEI PRIORI

Corso Mazzini, 15 – Assisi

☎ +39 075 816804


info@hoteldeipriori.it

www.hoteldeipriori.it

A lovely historic hotel right in the centre of Assisi with pleasant rooms. Have your breakfast in a frescoed room, listening to Vivaldi.



Standing as it does on the western slopes of Mt Subasio, Assisi enjoys some tremendous sunsets.



Clockwise from far left: the Ducal Palace in Urbino; the Hotel dei Priori; a statue of St Clare; Martin, our monk guide

guard who is resting his head on the edge of the tomb. On the way back to Assisi we stopped in Perugia and visited the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria to see Piero's *Polyptych of Saint Anthony*.

The next day we travelled to Urbino, another place I had always wanted to visit, and it certainly lived up to all my expectations despite the fact that it didn't stop raining all the time we were there. I felt sorry for the stall holders in the street all dressed up in medieval costumes for the Festa del Duca. The rain didn't seem to quell their spirits and they carried on enjoying themselves despite being soggy and damp. The first place we visited was the Oratorio di San Giovanni, full of wonderful frescoes by the Salimbeni brothers. Painted in 1416 they are very well preserved and very colourful. I was really impressed with them and am surprised that they are not better known. Visiting the Palazzo Ducale it was easy to visualise the comings and goings of Federico da Montefeltro's magnificent court and see why it was a reference point for Renaissance culture, and we got to see Piero's *Flagellation*, the last point on the Piero Trail too.

On all our trips we were driven around by Mauro, our own personal taxi driver, and he and Roy made a perfect double act. Roy knows all there is to know about the art and history of the area and Mauro gave us an insight into the Italian way of life and the politics and culture.

SAINT FRANCIS

In every corner of Assisi there is a building connected with St Francis and it took us all day to explore them all. The highlight of the day was definitely being shown round the Basilica by an American monk called

Martin, who gave us an insider's view. It is a magnificent building overflowing with beautiful frescoes and the most moving location in the Basilica complex is the crypt of Saint Francis, where the saint's body has been laid to rest. It's a quiet and reflective place with bench seating around the tomb.

The Basilica di Santa Chiara is situated at the other end of Assisi. Assisi is a long, narrow village situated on the slopes of Mount Subasio and it certainly keeps you fit as you meander along its steep, cobbled streets. St Clare was a spiritual contemporary of St Francis who founded the Poor Clares. She is buried in the crypt of the Santa Chiara church. The Byzantine cross that is said to have spoken to St Francis is also housed here. The Duomo di San Rufino in Assisi is where St Francis and St Clare were baptised.


Travelling down towards the valley you come across the Santuario di San Damiano, which was built on the spot where St Francis first heard the voice of Jesus and where he wrote the *Canticle of the Creatures*. We visited the original convent founded here by Saint Clare. Right down in the valley is the imposing Basilica di Santa Maria degli Angeli, which was built between 1565 and 1685 around the first Franciscan monastery and tiny Porziuncola Chapel. St Francis died here at the site of the Cappella del Transito. One of the anecdotes that Roy regaled us with was about the rose garden here. Apparently one day, trying to quell his lustful urges, St Francis threw himself into the rose bed. The story goes that the thorns immediately disappeared as he did ➤





View of the Val d'Orcia
from Pienza

On the way back to Assisi we stopped at the village of Pienza. Pope Pius II was born here and attempted to turn it into a Renaissance city, but died before he could finish it to his satisfaction.



**From far left:
the Abbey of
Sant'Antimo; a
shrine to St Francis**

this and the roses have grown thornless ever since. Many years later a visitor snipped a cutting from these roses when no one was looking and took it home with them. When they planted it on their return home the thorns grew back!

Despite having a busy week exploring Assisi and the local countryside there was always plenty of time to chill out and relax. On *Ferragosto*, the Italian August Bank Holiday, I was thrilled when Roy asked me to accompany him to Mass at the Basilica. I am not religious but this was an experience I would not have missed for the world. To see this great building being used for what it was built for and not heaving with hundreds of tourists was a wonderful experience. The smell of incense, the singing of *Ave Maria* and hundreds of fans fluttering in the heat will stay in my memory forever. Afterwards Roy took me for a drink at the main café in the main *piazza*. I was going to have a coke and do some exploring in the afternoon. However, I was easily persuaded to have a couple of large white wines and succumbed to the Italian custom of having a siesta!

LAKE TRASIMENO

Another day we travelled to Tuscany, stopping on the way at peaceful Lake Trasimeno for a coffee and to admire the view. Then a drive through Tuscany, with archetypal views of cypresses growing up hillsides. We finally reached the lovely Romanesque Abbey of Sant'Antimo, which stands in a splendidly isolated position surrounded by olive groves and wooded hills. The Abbey stood empty for five hundred years and is now maintained by a small group of French

monks who celebrate mass several times a day in a haunting Gregorian chant. The story goes that the Abbey was founded by Charlemagne, who halted with his army nearby and prayed to God, asking for relief from the disease which was crippling his army, promising that he would found a church if his prayers were answered. An angel appeared and showed him a herb to cure his men, which worked, and Charlemagne founded Sant'Antimo. On the way back to Assisi we stopped at the village of Pienza. Pope Pius II was born here and attempted to turn it into a Renaissance city, but he died before he could finish it. Today it is a charming town with beautiful views, enticing cheese shops and the museum, which contains the world-famous Cope.

On the last day we travelled to San Pietro in Valle, a Romanesque abbey with wonderful sculptures and frescoes. We then visited the Marmore Waterfall, an awe-inspiring sight which one of my fellow travellers pronounced as exciting as the Niagara Falls. This waterfall is a man-made one built by the Romans to drain the unhealthy swamps in the area and is used today to generate electricity.

As well as all the art and culture, good food was an integral part of this trip. Black truffles featured strongly on the menu on the restaurants in the area and on the last night Roy hosted a wine tasting session in his home where a variety of local wines were on offer, along with advice from a local wine expert. Despite seeing and doing so much in a week I felt very relaxed and was able to spend time exploring Assisi on my own. Roy had got the balance just right. ■

INFORMATION

► Costs from £1,095pp (two sharing), including flights (Stansted), transfers, seven nights B&B, two lunches, two dinners, entrance fees and excursions as per the itinerary and the services of a guide and local representative. Call Voyages Jules Verne on ☎ 020 3553 3722 or visit www.vjv.com



Gourmet Guide to The Val d'Orcia

With a history steeped deep in the philosophy of *La Cucina Povera*, the Val d'Orcia offers taste and tradition.
Wanda Djebbar guides us on a gastro tour through the past and present...





Cantucci with vin santo



Crostini dressed with tomato, Tuscan soul food



Bread and biscuits



Panzanella, a bread salad



Wheat fields are a common sight in the Val d'Orcia

Those among you who are looking for rich, difficult, complicated food to combine with sublime landscapes, art and architecture will be disappointed by the Val d'Orcia. This is an area of Tuscany that combines some of the most beautiful, characteristic landscapes of the region with an ancient, pared-back way of cooking that positively celebrates the necessity that created it.

Let us be clear as to what *La Cucina Povera* means in the Val d'Orcia. It really does translate as, and mean, 'poor cooking' or 'poor cuisine' – which may not sound very appetising. But stop, taste and then think. What it means is intensely seasonal food; locally, or indeed home-grown food, combined carefully and with skill, and totally in tune with nature. Not so poor-sounding now is it? In fact, it's rather what many of us are actively trying to return to.

This is still a very rural area and many people still feel closely linked to the land. Many, many families maintain an *orto*, a vegetable plot.

The restaurants that you eat in, the markets (yes, use them – you will eat better for it) and even the co-op supermarkets will all aim to supply much of their fresh seasonal produce from a much smaller, more local area than is the case in, for example, the UK.

So how does it work and what should you look out for in this 'not so poor after all' part of the world?

STRIPS OF WHEAT

Traditionally, bread was the staple in the diet of the *contadini* (peasant farmers) and ordinary folk here. Every farm had its strips of wheat, often planted between the vines or olives; then there were – and are – the rolling, open hills where wheat is the principal crop. Bread here is traditionally unsalted and even today provides the backbone of some of the most dearly-loved dishes. Unsalted, it kept better, which was good as it was baked only weekly down on the farm, and anyway, salt was taxed.

Bread, however hard, was never, ever, wasted and that very hardness was a positive benefit in the many soup dishes that you will find;

from *Pappa al pomodoro* with the summer's tomatoes, to the bean rich *Ribollita* of autumn and winter.

Crostini and *Bruschette*, both being slices of bread, are the most common form of *antipasto* at the beginning of a meal in the Val d'Orcia; toasted country bread with tomatoes, oil and a touch of garlic and basil are not a cliché when met with in this part of the world; they are a feast.

While bread is the staple, a few types of pasta do exist, principally *Pinci* or *Pici*, a simple flour and water handrolled thick 'spaghetti' that is soul food here. They reach their height of *cucina povera* when they are served dressed, as they so often were, with breadcrumbs fried in oil, *Pici con Briciole*. You will also find *Pici al aglione* (tomato and garlic sauce), with ragu, with wild mushrooms or occasionally with duck or wild boar. *Pappardelle* pasta ribbons will be found with a sauce of hare, and *tagliatelle* may be made if there are truffles to be enjoyed!

The staple, bread, the pasta and (almost) every other dish eaten in the Val d'Orcia, invariably contains one vital, unmissable ➤

Bread was the staple in the diet of the contadini (peasant farmers) and ordinary folk here

FOOD AND DRINK

WEEKLY MARKETS

My advice would be to do as locals do and enjoy the weekly market day. My favourites would be either Montalcino or Buonconvento, on the northern edge of the Val d'Orcia. Both offer possibilities beyond the market and Buonconvento is flat – good for carrying heavy shopping! The fruit and vegetables on the stalls are second to none and there are excellent local cured *Salumi* (cured pork) such as fennel seed *Salame finocchiona* and *Porchetta*, spit-roast whole pig, which makes a great market day lunch. *Pecorino*, sheep's milk cheeses, will be from Pienza, considered the finest in the area. Although inland from the Tuscan coast these markets sell squeaky fresh seafood, take home some *Totani* to make simple *Totani ripiene*, stuffed squid. Don't feel like cooking? Order a *fritto misto* of seafood or maybe a spit-roasted chicken. Remember that markets start packing up at 1 o'clock for lunch!

FARMERS' MARKETS

Look out for *Mercatini*, which are the producers'/farmers' markets. These are mostly held monthly, sometimes only during the growing season; you will find them at Montalcino, Pienza and Castel del Piano, among other places. Here you will find everything from *Pecorino* cheeses to heritage chick peas and tiny production honeys (that locally are thought to combine very nicely with the *Pecorino* cheese!).

LOCAL SHOPS

Every hill town in the area has a good array of food shops and recipes will be thrown in! In Montalcino try the Lambardi bakery and Mariuccia patisserie; both have some of the best and most representative baked goods of the Val d'Orcia; taste a variety of *Panforte*, all packed with the almonds, candied peels and spices redolent of the medieval luxury spice trade in Siena. Also try sweet crispy *ossi dei morte*, a Montalcino speciality.



Truffle hunting

ingredient: oil. Or to be more specific, olive oil. And to be absolutely precise, fresh oil from olives grown in the Val d'Orcia, and cold pressed at a competent *frantoio*, olive press, resulting in an oil full of life and character. No 'infusing' 'spiking' or any other addition needed. The ceiling of the Sistine chapel really does not require any highlighting with magic marker – it really is rather good as it is. The oil is used from everything from sweating the *odori* (onions, carrot, celery, maybe parley) at the beginning of making soup, to tossing the vegetables, enriching the bowl of soup, to deep frying the *cenci*, pastries, and making cakes.

Absolutely essential.

Bread, oil, wine. A triumvirate.

FORAGING

Now truffles may seem totally contrary to *Cucina Povera* but no! They are (the height of) that great Tuscan passion and tradition, foraging. When times were truly hard, as they frequently were, then foraging was, quite simply, the difference between survival and succumbing to hunger. It was often also the difference between a bland, vitamin-light diet and something with some zingy flavour that was packed with nutrients.

You will still find some survivals from this necessity on the menu; when you find *verdure* on the menu, these may be chard or spinach, but they may well be supplemented by nettles or a variety of other wild greenery. In spring, Tuscan homes will frequently feature an *Insalata del Campo*, or field salad, on the menu and you need to be up early in the day and have good, tuned-in

eyesight to find the delicious wild asparagus stalks lurking in field margins. A *frittata con asparagi*, the slow-cooked omelette with asparagus, will certainly not make your taste buds feel poverty-stricken and hard done by!

Truffles and their *funghi* cousins remain the highpoint of the foraging seasons in the Val d'Orcia and contribute finely to food in the area. Truffles are found most prolifically at San Giovanni d'Asso on the border of the Val d'Orcia and the Crete Senesi. The November and March Truffle Fairs there give a perfect taster of what heights food can reach here. There cannot be many places whose museum is devoted to the truffle, but so it is in San Giovanni! *Funghi* are duely revered here and enrich autumn food; dried, their power lives on in dishes throughout winter and beyond. Fresh, they are served as *antipasti* raw salads. If they are *ovoli*, a particular egg-shaped wild mushroom, this can be totally sublime.

Fresh large *porcini*, (cep), mushroom caps can be combined with the Tuscan love of cooking over the embers of a wood fire to create a dish that vegetarians and everybody else will find intensely flavoursome. Fire embers, *Porcini* caps (save the stems for another dish) and a little olive oil and salt/pepper roast down to something deeply, wildly, savoury succulent that only needs some good bread to mop up the juices.

CHESTNUTS

Another foraged food that is eaten both fresh and dried are chestnuts, a food that has played a vital part throughout history in this area. Now, you may enjoy them fresh, dried, or as flour, their sweet,

When times were truly hard, foraging was, quite simply, the difference between survival and succumbing to hunger



Asparagus season is always to be celebrated



Olives from the trees...



...to the frantoio



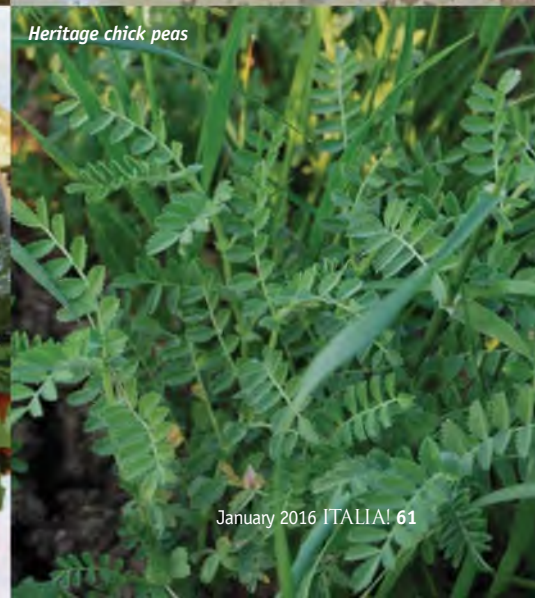
Castagnaccio, chestnut cake



Greens!



Spelt salad



Heritage chick peas

FOOD AND DRINK

WINE

Montalcino means wine! Taste your way around at one of the many *Enoteche*, wine bars/shops. Bruno Dalmazio, on the edge of town, is like a wine library; they will also ship to Europe. For a carefully chosen glass of wine and nibbles, try Le Logge in the centre, by the medieval town hall.

RESTAURANTS

At Montalcino, go to the Re di Macchia, where Roberta's wild boar is a triumph, and the Porta al Casero, both for true Montalcinese home cooking. In Pienza: Dal Falco; I would go much, much further than Pienza for the *Pici* Silvana serves, and for her husband's magical touch with the wood grill. Over the Orcia river at Montenero d'Orcia, the Antica Fattoria del Grottaione has food and a view that vie with one another to astonish the senses. Unmissable. Buonconvento: La Porta di Sotto for well-chosen ingredients and cooking.

FOOD FESTIVALS

Do not overlook the many food festivals in the area: celebrate autumn and spring truffles at San Giovanni d'Asso in November and March. Montalcino's honey festival in September buzzes with unusual honey, and the New Oil festival in San Quirico gives you the chance to taste just how different oil fresh from the press is. The many medieval costumed tournaments, such as Montalcino's Apertura della Caccia or Pienza's cheese-rolling game (!) are opportunities to eat splendid traditional food at long tables if you book with one of the *quartiere*.



Pecorino, sheep's cheese, on display



Tuscan tastes of spring – artichokes, peppers, asparagus, courgettes... and lots of broad beans

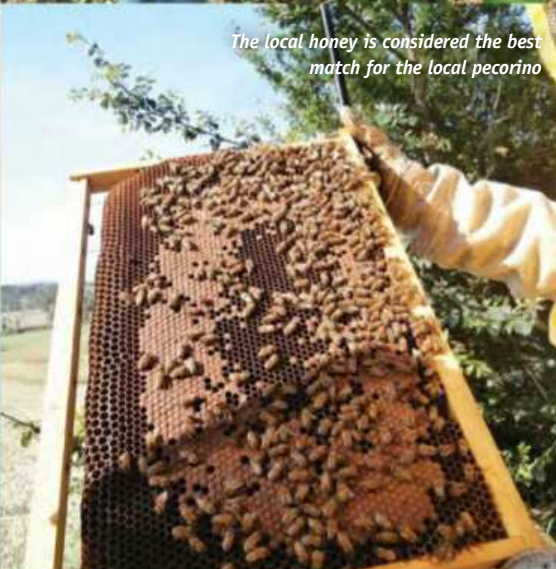




Training vines



Chick peas are a good source of protein in la cucina povera



The local honey is considered the best match for the local pecorino



Where would tomatoes be without basil!

almost smoky flavour roasted, or in pasta, soups, crepes or sweet dishes. Previously it was the reliability as well as the taste of the chestnut that endeared it to people, when the wheat harvest was scarce or was plundered in war. Now, *Castagnaccio*, the simplest of chestnut flour cakes, is a sweet reminder of harder times, but the source of the best local chestnuts still remains Monte Amiata. A good excuse for a delightful autumn walk through the countryside.

BEANS

Which other elements are dear to the stomach of the Val d'Orcia? Beans! Until the easing of hardship in post-war years, beans provided a large part of the protein regularly eaten. But if you are fortunate enough to have access to home-grown olive oil, without which it is most unlikely that most people would have survived, then the beans you eat take on a creamier more

satisfying taste and texture. Cooked, once again alongside a wood fire, *fagioli al fiasco*, beans cooked in a flask, are flavoursome and wholesome dressed with the peppery local oil. Leftover beans go into soups and give *Ribollita* (reboiled) soup its name! *Ceci*, chick peas, eaten here can also be a revelation; small and delicately flavoured they do not require two hours boiling to avoid being harmful proto projectiles. Boiled chick peas, *Ceci lessate*, dressed with oil, a grind of pepper and a sprig of rosemary feature throughout the year and also find their way into *Pasta e ceci* and various soups. You may even find them ground into flour and appearing as a pancake/cake called *cecina*, more usual in coastal Tuscany – and even reaching as far Nice as *Socca*.

Some older elements of *Cucina Povera* are being consciously revived; rare breeds and forgotten cultivation methods are reinforcing the authenticity of food in the Val

d'Orcia. Maremmana cattle, the mighty Chianina beef cattle, and the Cinta Senese pig are all ancient breeds enjoying a renaissance that contributes to culinary quality.

Home-grown spices were few and therefore not widely used in the Val d'Orcia, so black pepper, nutmeg or cinnamon are either later additions or belong to a narrower culinary experience than we are looking at here. But there is now a worthy exception to this: saffron! This is once again thriving in these hills thanks to a few farmers looking back to a local culinary highlight. Look out and you will be rewarded with an aromatic burst of intense gold, well worth taking home for experiments in your own kitchen.

La Cucina Povera was a way of eating that was dictated by necessity and the landscape of the Val d'Orcia; now it is no longer a strict necessity but has become a pleasurable, and sensible, way to nourish body and soul. ■

Some older elements of Cucina Povera are being consciously revived, such as rare breeds and forgotten cultivation methods

Relocation Directory

Relocating to Italy is the dream of many people, but in order to **make that dream a reality** you will need expert advice and consultancy on a range of issues...

BUSINESS



SETTING UP A BUSINESS IN ITALY

Setting yourself up in business in Italy is not quite as simple as it is in the UK. You can't just sit in front of the computer, register your business, start trading and then at the end of the year complete your tax return and send it to the HMRC. Going self employed will require an accountant to sort out your *partita IVA* and file all your

returns for you. If you decide to set up an *SRL* then you will also need a *notaio* to register your company and exactly what it is you are going to be doing. If there is the possibility that your business will grow into other areas then you should include these from the start as you will have to pay to add them later. One of the things I have found while living and working in Italy is that changes to both Italian and European laws tend to take a long time to be implemented so it is very important to find an accountant, solicitor, etc,

who keep themselves up to date or you can easily find yourself missing out on new opportunities or being penalised by a non-existent law. However, with all that said, if you apply an honest, productive, efficient work ethic to your business you will certainly have an advantage over much of your local competition. Being clear and transparent when dealing with your customers, keeping them informed and delivering to agreed timescales is something that is rare in the current climate, especially here in the south.

One of the things I have found in Italy is that changes to both Italian and European laws tend to take a long time to be implemented



CONTACT DETAILS

► PUGLIA POOLS
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Via Giovanni Giolitti, 8,
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☎ +39 392 288 2775
chris@pugliapools.com
www.pugliapools.com

LANGUAGES



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I offer homestay and personalized Italian lessons to students of any age, in the wonderful lake area in the northwest of Italy. My guests would live as a member of the family for a week or longer. I am a friendly person who loves teaching her own

I always try to meet my guests' interests – from museums to natural spots, from the lakes to the mountains

language and taking foreign visitors sightseeing. I teach the language sitting at a table doing exercises, as well as going sightseeing, reading a newspaper or watching and discussing a film, all this according to the student's preferences and level.



I can host a single student or a couple. You would be welcome to get involved in the family's activities in order to have a full and pleasant immersion in the language and lifestyle. I always try to meet my guests' interests: from museums to wonderful natural spots, from the lakes to the mountains, from wineries to outlets and meeting friends, all year round.

From the moment I pick you up at the airport you will only think about studying and enjoying your holiday, which I promise will be unforgettable!



CONTACT DETAILS

► **LUCIA DEZUANI**
luciadezuani@hotmail.it
www.luciadezuani.com
www.youtube.com/
watch?v=xCKrtK9oZ2A

FINANCES



MOVING TO ITALY? MAKE SURE YOUR MONEY IS IN SAFE HANDS

If you are looking to move to Italy, fluctuating exchange rates might be the last thing on your mind. However, subtle differences in the value of currencies can make a huge impact on the amount you end up with when it comes to sending money overseas. When it comes to the currency

Subtle differences in the value of currencies can make a huge impact on the amount you end up with when it comes to sending money overseas

markets, things can change over the course of just a few days.

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PAST ITALIA!





LA GALLERIA VITTORIO EMANUELE II

If you thought shopping malls were a modern phenomenon, think again.
Il Salotto di Milano, Milan's drawing room, was completed in 1877...

Milan's world famous shopping arcade is named for the first king of all Italy in the modern era and stands as an early symbol of the *Risorgimento*, the decades-long process that culminated in the formal unification of Italy in 1871.

Linking two of the city's most iconic buildings, the Duomo and the Scala, La Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II was designed in 1861 and built between 1865 and 1877. As such it predates by 13 years the Galleria Umberto I in Naples, which is named for the man who succeeded Vittorio Emanuele II to the throne in 1878, and which takes more than a little design inspiration from its cousin in Lombardy – not least in the glass domed roof.

Yet though it was the first building of its kind in Italy, Milan's Galleria is far from being Europe's first shopping arcade. The Passazh in St Petersburg (1848), Les Galeries Royales Saint-Hubert in Brussels (1847), London's Burlington Arcade (1819), Paris's Galerie Vivienne (1823) and Passage du Caire (1798) – to name but two in the City of Light, home of the covered arcade – were all welcoming shoppers long before Giuseppe Mengoni's masterpiece opened its first till register.

Today, however, it is perhaps the gallery in Milan that is the most famous of them all, a place for the people of Milan to meet to eat, drink and socialise as well as to shop, and a mark of the concerted effort that was made by the newly formed State of Italy to impose its cultural identity on the international stage. ■

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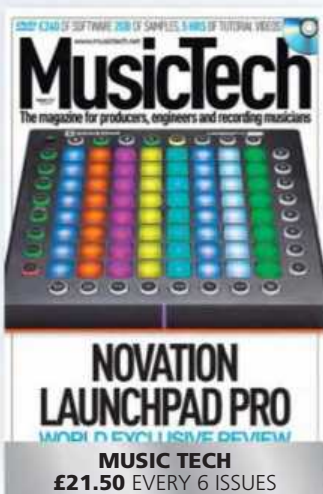
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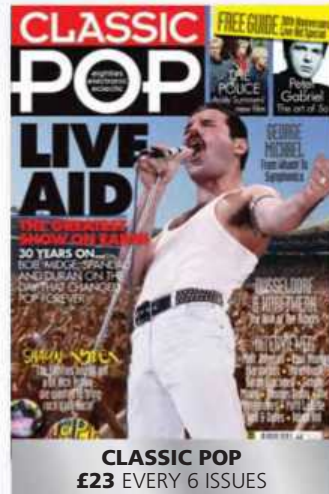
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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS



ALISON HONOR has lived in Alberobello for eight years. In England she was the manager of a lettings agency; now she works for Perfect Puglia, letting out holiday homes. She has a six-year-old daughter who now speaks better Italian than herself, and feels lucky that she was able to make the move. www.perfectpuglia.com



LAURA PROTTI is dual qualified as an Italian *avvocato* and English solicitor. She has extensive experience in Italian property law, international private law, contract law, succession law, and taxation, and has assisted with the drafting and updating of books and articles on Italian Law. www.leplaw.co.uk



MAXIMILLIAN SMITH is Marketing Manager at De'Longhi UK and has a wealth of knowledge about coffee. De'Longhi make some of the best coffee machines on the market today – to see the full range of options for home coffee machines see their website at www.seriousaboutcoffee.com

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Our experts are here to help with all your questions about Italy. Email your questions to italia@anthem-publishing.com, or write to us at our usual address, as given on page 18.



It is worth learning some Italian before you move to the country

LEARNING ITALIAN

Q *My husband and I have always dreamed of moving to the south of Italy, and would love to semi-retire and start our own property management business. My husband is a partner in a property maintenance company here in the UK. I was wondering if you know of anyone with experience on moving to Italy and starting a business? I'm a little worried that our lack of Italian language will hold us back, and would greatly appreciate some advice on how to go about learning Italian before we take the plunge.*

Katherine Anning, York

A Two years of once-a-week Italian lessons is what we had under our belts when we moved here in 2007. The first week we walked into the gas office to ask to have our gas reconnected. We had everything written out that we could think of – the address, our names, what we wanted. We went in, a little nervously, waited our turn and then we were off, “Can you please reconnect our gas,” we asked. It was working. They were getting the forms out for us to fill in. Then they asked us a couple of questions. Nothing. No comprehension whatsoever of what they were asking us. Two years of lessons! However, the friendly staff finally understood what we wanted and they helped us to fill out the

forms. We went away and within a couple hours we were reconnected to gas! That night we took our first shower using hot water from the tap, not from the watering can that we used to fill up and leave in the sun to warm up during the day. The sense of achievement was amazing and we celebrated with a couple of glasses of the fabulous local wine.

If you are thinking of moving to Puglia, learning the language before you make the move is essential. There are very few people here who speak English. Most people under the age of 40 have knowledge of a few words as it has been compulsory in school for some time but, as is the same for all languages, there is not the opportunity for them to speak it and so most of it is forgotten. Some people are just so frightened to speak to you once they know that Italian is not your first language, and should you need to go to the doctor's or the hospital it can be really frightening if you don't understand anything.

Once here, there is ample opportunity to progress further with the language. Finding a teacher can be hard and expensive, but worth it. Speaking the language will help you to feel part of the community and get the most of this fantastic life!

Alison Honor, Partner, Perfect Puglia

TAX ON RENTAL INCOME

Q I have £500,000 to invest and I'd like to spend it on a property in Italy as my husband and I enjoy visiting three or four times a year. I intend to rent it out throughout the summer in order to cover some of the running costs. What is my legal status regarding tax? Would I pay tax to the Italian government or to the UK government on any rental income? And what 'costs' can I offset against that income (cost of cleaning, essential services etc?). Finally, would I be best off making this potential purchase in my name or in mine and my husband's joint names in terms of inheritance tax?

Stephanie Herbert, Worcester

A Private individuals who own a holiday property in Italy can rent their properties to tourists for short periods of time. They must declare their income to the Italian tax authorities as income produced from properties located in Italy is subject to Italian income tax. However, British citizens who paid income tax in Italy on income raised from renting their Italian property can offset the taxes paid against their income tax liabilities in the UK in accordance with the double taxation treaty between Italy and the UK.

In addition to this, property owners may have to register their rental activity for VAT purposes with the Italian tax authorities when they rent their property on a regular and "professional" basis. The business of renting the property therefore is subject to VAT provisions when the owner receives a regular income from the property rental arrangement. In this case, the business is subject to corporate tax liabilities.

When the property is rented for periods longer than 30 days, the rental agreement should be registered with the Italian tax authorities.

The rental agreement should always specify the details of the property and the parties. When the property is rented to non-European citizens the owner must notify the local Police office (*Autorità di pubblica sicurezza*) and provide the details of the tenants within 48 hours of check-in.

Laura Protti, LEP Law

Rental income must be declared for taxation



Laura Protti is the founder of LEP Law. She is dual-qualified as an Italian *avvocato* and English solicitor, and specialises in assisting British and Italian clients with matters relating to Italian law. Visit her website at www.leplaw.co.uk for more.



Coffee Corner

BURNING QUESTION

Q I like my coffee really hot, but is it possible to 'burn' coffee by heating it too much? And would doing so make it bitter? Do the De'Longhi bean-to-cup machines enable you to alter the temperature of the coffee (and frothed milk) so I can have a really hot coffee without over-doing it? And what would you consider to be the ideal temperature for an espresso or cappuccino?

Helen James, Hampshire

A It is possible to 'burn coffee'. Brewing above 92°C will impart bitter notes to a coffee. A coffee like a cappuccino will be mostly milk. Milk also degrades if the temperature exceeds 75°C, resulting in an unpleasant 'formula milk' or UHT flavour. Of course an artisan *barista* knows this and has trained extensively to serve coffee at the ideal temperature. Coffee is meant to be enjoyed in the moment, so anything which you find too hot to drink right away is most likely to be 'over-cooked' – unfortunately quite typical for big chain coffee shops.

De'Longhi bean-to-cup machines take the complexity out of this process yet allow a certain degree of flexibility to set the temperature (82°C-92°C) for espresso-based coffee. Milk is never served hotter than 75°C, so if you enjoy milky drinks, it will be less hot than a straight black coffee. The cup can make a big difference too: preheating cups is essential, especially for an espresso; a thick, cold ceramic cup will sap much of the coffee temperature.

Fortunately De'Longhi bean-to-cup machines have optional cup warming features and run a preheating / rinse cycle when you switch them on, ensuring even the first cup is the perfect temperature.



Maximillian Smith,
Trade Marketing Manager De'Longhi
www.seriousaboutcoffee.com

The De'Longhi
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Italian Gourmet UK

At *Italia!* we know how much our readers appreciate exploring Italy and enjoying its various delicious regional specialties. So, just in case you don't make it to Italy any time soon, **Lorenza Bacino** has been finding out where you can buy the tastiest Italian ingredients here in the UK...

ALESSANDRO'S, DERBY

Genuine authentic Italian products with a slow food approach

Carol Phillips is the founder and owner of the only Italian deli in Derby. Carol prides herself on stocking authentic and locally sourced products from the Abruzzo region in central Italy. Her love of Italy started with holidays, eventually leading to the purchase of a house in her beloved Abruzzo about eight years ago. When she was made redundant, she decided to take the plunge and follow her heart by "bringing a little bit of Italian sunshine to Derby". Following advice from Abruzzo locals, she researched and selected products from small producers, all of whom she knows personally.

"Our pasta comes from a tiny Abruzzo family producer based in the mountains there," explains Carol. "They've been making pasta for three generations and there are only three

people who do this!" What makes it different is that the pasta is dried outside in the mountain and sea air, without the blasting heat from the supermarket variety, and so has more texture and flavour. She also stocks a selection of jams and honeys from the village of Giuliano in a very green part of the region, famous for its cherry festival in the month of June. Other specialities include some large mortadella, caciocavallo, and other niche cheeses.

Her business has been running for the past 18 months and has an ever-growing clientele of foodies, including some of Derby's well-established resident Italians, all of whom visit her stall at the historic Victorian Market Hall on a regular basis. "We're really popular," she says, "so we must be doing something right."



Artisan bread



Coffee and moka pots



The shop front at Alessandro's



Oils from Abruzzo



Alessandro's supplies the restaurant trade too



This pasta is naturally dried



Arrabbiata and pesto

CONTACT DETAILS

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43/62 Derby Market Hall, Derby DE1 2DB, Mon-Sat 9am-5pm
☎ 07 983 089 589
www.alessandros-derby.co.uk

SAPORI TRUFFLES

The only specialist truffle supplier in Scotland

Gianpaolo La Greca prides himself on being able to source and supply truffles within a 24-48 hour window.

All the truffles are sourced at the right time, from three suppliers based in different regions of Italy. This means he can keep up with demand from his customers. He's the only truffle specialist and one of only a handful of reliable suppliers in Scotland.

"I sell fresh truffles in season," he says. "That's my primary objective. I don't hold stock. And I can quote you on one truffle, and if you purchase it online before midday, you'll get it the next day."

His passion with the truffle began whilst working for a food importer in London. He saw a gap in the market in Scotland, and snapped up the opportunity on his return.

He's been supplying UK restaurants since 1997 and has an online truffle club of around 400 members.

And if you're clever about it, a truffle can go quite a long way, as they're great for sharing. Recipes include shaving it onto risotto and pasta dishes and slicing it over meats or fish. Also a good tip is to wrap it in a tissue and enclose it in a jar with eggs. Overnight the eggs will infuse with the flavour and you won't have used any of your truffle.

CONTACT DETAILS

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Gianpaolo La Greca inspects a find

Edinburgh, Scotland's truffle capital



Photograph © iStock

LIMONCELLO

Specialist deli in Cambridge

The Italian liqueur Limoncello was the inspiration behind the idea, but this deli and bar is so much more than that. Steve Turvill has spent the last 15 years building up his business and stocking refined Italian food products in Cambridge.

"If Nigella says you need a particular niche ingredient for one of her recipes, you're guaranteed to find it here," says Steve confidently. "We pride ourselves on stocking those unusual products not easily available in the UK."

Everything is painstakingly sourced from a team of 200 different suppliers stretching the length and breadth of Italy.

"It's all authentic and tasty," says Steve, "and we encourage people to try before they buy."

This practice is what Steve refers to as "eatucation", which means educating the British palate about Italian food. So when people ask the difference between Parma ham and prosciutto, Steve encourages his customers to taste the difference for themselves.

Steve is also proud of his selection of "weird liqueurs". He stocks digestifs such as Cynar or Fernet Branca, which are common in Italy but largely unknown here – and of course, everybody's favourite, Limoncello, of which multiple varieties are available from his shop.



Steve Turvill's Cambridge shop front



White truffle honey?
Certainly, madam...



White and black
truffles



Customers are invited to
try before they buy



A variety of
liqueurs

Photograph © Alice Toby-Grant

CONTACT DETAILS

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3NF, a mile south of the city centre
☎ 01223 507036
www.limoncello.co.uk



LAVOLIO

Confectionery as it should be

Former investment banker and passionate sweet lover Lavinia Davolio fell in love with the idea of making healthier adult sweets following some rather unsuccessful attempts at recreating marshmallows in her own kitchen. She realised she needed to find an alternative to mass-produced cheap sugar and animal gelatine, so she sought help from an Italian patissier.

After three months of training, she began producing sugared almonds in revolving copper pans.

"These sweets take four to five days to produce," explains Lavinia. "We only use apple-based, vegetarian jelly. First, we toast the nuts



and candy real pieces of fruit. Then chocolate and spice flavours are added layer by layer. Finally, the sweets are gently spun around in copper revolving pans. This ensures they are crunchy on the outside yet flavoursome on the inside."

Today, a Lavolio gourmet confectionery selection comprises 30 different flavours, all made using natural products. "People can enjoy our artisan sweets as a healthier alternative to cheap, mass-produced varieties. They're more natural and more satisfying and a real taste adventure."

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VINI ITALIANI

Specialises in only Italian wines

If it's a more in-depth knowledge of Italian wine you're after, then Vini Italiani in London's Old Brompton Road has been specialising exclusively in Italian wines since it opened in 2011. The co-founder and managing director, Bruno Cernecca, explains, "It's about engaging with the person and their memory of Italy. People's faces light up as I help them remember what they drank on their holiday. I love that we can give something of that experience back."

The collection here numbers over 600 and the refined wine bar area has successfully re-created a taste of Italy, with its relaxed ambience and warm hospitality. "It's a slow experience, unlike a pub when you just quickly down a beer and leave," says Bruno. "People can have their experience in a glass and on a plate."



A classic Italian *aperitivo* after work traditionally involves enjoying cheeses and cold cuts with a glass of your favourite wine. If you stay long enough, they'll be no need for dinner!

As well as the ever popular Chianti or Prosecco, people are exploring new flavours and grapes. "We tailor-make our customers' choices," explains Bruno, "and we only do new releases, so you take your bottle home and enjoy it immediately, not in a year's time." ■

CONTACT DETAILS

- VINI ITALIANI
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4 takes on PRAWNS

Prawns are easy to cook and **good for you**. There are sustainability issues, however, as well as ethical concerns over some farming practices, so check your sources!





Fish soup with prawns

Zuppa di pesce con gamberetti

Every country has its own take on fish soup. Here is an Italian version, with strong influences from Tuscany.

SERVES 2

- **Preparation**
25 minutes
- **Cooking**
20 minutes

INGREDIENTS

- ½ a fennel bulb, with leaves
- 400g mixed fish fillets of your choice (eg red mullet, conger eel, monkfish)
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, peeled, sliced into thin rings
- 2 ripe tomatoes, skins and seeds removed, diced
- 500ml fish stock
- 1 tsp chopped thyme leaves
- 1 bay leaf
- a pinch of saffron threads
- 6 prawns, cleaned, shelled and prepared with the intestinal vein removed
- salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tbsp flat-leaf parsley, chopped, to garnish

Wash and trim the fennel, remove the stalk and thinly slice the bulb. Finely chop the fennel leaves and put aside to decorate the soup when you serve.

Wash, dry and dice the fish fillets that you have chosen.

Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan, add the onions and sweat until translucent. Add the fennel, fry for a few minutes, then add the tomatoes, fish stock, herbs and saffron, and leave to simmer for around 8 minutes.

Add the fish and prawns to the saucepan and cook the soup very gently over a low heat for around 5 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper, then serve sprinkled with fennel leaves and parsley.



Prawns on mini polenta rounds

Dischetti di polenta con gamberetti

For a slight variation on this recipe, use an extra lime and squeeze some of the juice into the pan while cooking the prawns to create a stronger flavour. Alternatively, substituting the lime for another citrus fruit, such as orange, will work just as well.

SERVES 2

- **Preparation**
10 minutes plus
1 hour cooling
- **Cooking**
25 minutes

INGREDIENTS

- 125g polenta
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, peeled, chopped
- 100g prawns, cleaned, shelled and prepared with the intestinal vein removed
- salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 lime, halved lengthways, sliced

Bring a saucepan of water to the boil, add the polenta and cook according to packet instructions.

Once the polenta is cooked, spread it out onto a board to form a layer approximately 1.5cm thick. Leave the polenta to cool completely, then fry until golden on both sides.

Heat the oil in a frying pan, add the garlic and prawns, and fry the prawns on both sides. Season.

Cut out small rounds of polenta using a circular cutter, then place a prawn and a slice of lime on top of each polenta round to serve.



3

Cold melon soup with prawns

Vellutata di melone con gamberetti

This cold soup will go down a treat no matter the time of year. Practise the recipe now and you'll have perfected it by the time this year's melons have ripened!

SERVES 2
 ➤ **Preparation**
 15 minutes
 ➤ **Cooking**
 5 minutes

INGREDIENTS

½ a *Galia* melon
 1 garlic clove
 2 tbsp soft cheese
 20ml sherry
 2 tbsp olive oil
 4 prawns, cleaned, shelled and prepared with the intestinal vein removed
 4 cherry tomatoes, halved
 salt and freshly ground black pepper
 a few sprigs of marjoram

Peel and quarter the melon, remove the seeds and dice the flesh. Peel and halve the garlic. Finely chop half of the garlic.

Put the melon into a liquidiser with the unchopped half of garlic, soft cheese and sherry, then purée.

Heat the oil in a frying pan and sauté the prawns and the chopped garlic. Add the tomatoes and toss over the heat for 2-3 minutes. Season. Remove the prawns from the pan and thread onto two wooden skewers.

Pour the soup into glasses, add the tomatoes and marjoram, and serve with the skewered prawns on top of the glasses.



4

Linguine with prawns

Linguine ai gamberetti

Prawns with linguine is a classic dish you will find served all over Italy.

SERVES 2
 ➤ **Preparation**
 10 minutes
 ➤ **Cooking**
 15 minutes

INGREDIENTS

200g linguine
 1 celery stick
 2 tbsp olive oil
 150g prawns, cleaned, shelled and prepared with the intestinal vein removed
 1 garlic clove, peeled, finely chopped
 1 tsp juniper berries, roughly crushed
 100ml dry white wine
 2 tbsp sliced chives
 2 tbsp unsalted butter
 salt and freshly ground black pepper

Bring a saucepan of salted water to the boil, add the linguine and cook according to packet instructions until al dente.

Wash, trim and thinly slice the celery, then roughly chop the celery leaves.

Heat the oil in a frying pan, add the prawns and celery, then sauté. Add the garlic and juniper berries to the frying pan, then deglaze with white wine.

Cook the mixture very gently for around 4 minutes, then add the celery leaves and chives. Remove from the heat, stir in the butter and season to taste. Drain the pasta, then carefully toss in with the prawn mixture to serve.

Quick and Easy Italian Recipes

Four compatible recipes from the latest title in Phaidon's bestselling *Silver Spoon* series, presenting authentic Italian recipes suitable for cooks of all levels...

Sausage crostini

Crostini con salsiccia

► **SERVES** 4-6 ► **PREPARATION** 10 minutes ► **COOKING** 15 minutes

INGREDIENTS

3 Italian sausages, casings removed

150g stracchino cheese, such as taleggio or robiola, chopped

1 tbsp fennel seeds

salt

4-6 slices country-style bread

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4.

Crumble the sausages into a bowl and mix in the cheese and fennel seeds. Season with salt to taste and stir well.

Spread the mixture on the slices of bread, place on a baking sheet, and bake for 15 minutes, or until crisp and golden.

Arrange on a plate and serve immediately.





Conchiglie with gorgonzola and pistachios

Conchiglie con gorgonzola e pistacchi

► **SERVES** 4 ► **PREPARATION** 15 minutes ► **COOKING** 15 minutes

INGREDIENTS

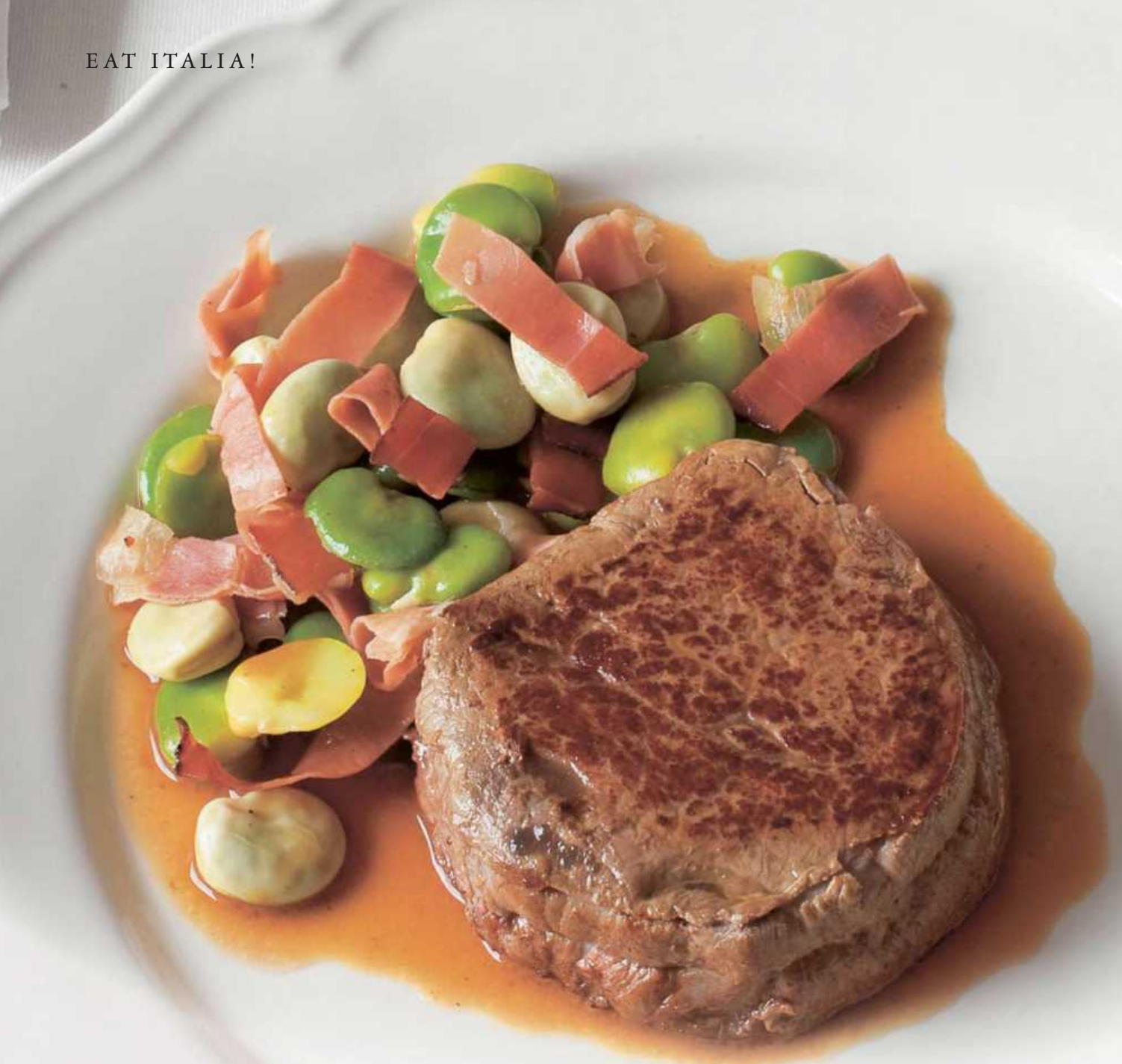
50g pistachios
100g strong gorgonzola, diced
175ml double cream
300g conchiglie (shell pasta)
salt
40g grated parmesan cheese

Put the pistachios into a small heatproof bowl and pour boiling water over to cover. Let stand for 3 minutes and drain.

When cool enough to handle, rub off the skins with your fingers. Chop and set aside.

Put the gorgonzola and cream into a small saucepan and heat very gently for about 10 minutes, stirring constantly until the cheese has melted and the sauce is completely smooth, then remove from the heat.

Meanwhile, cook the pasta in a large saucepan of salted, boiling water until al dente. Drain, transfer to a warm serving dish, and toss with the melted gorgonzola mixture, chopped pistachios, and parmesan. serve immediately.



Beef tenderloin with broad beans

Filetto di manzo con fave

► **SERVES** 4 ► **PREPARATION** 10 minutes ► **COOKING** 10-20 minutes

INGREDIENTS

100g shelled frozen broad beans
140g beef tenderloin (fillet) steaks
plain flour, for dusting
3 tbsp olive oil
100ml dry white wine
45g speck or prosciutto, cut into strips
salt and pepper

Cook the beans in a saucepan of salted, boiling water for 3-5 minutes, until tender, then drain. Squeeze the beans out of their skins with your thumb and index finger and set aside.

Dust the steaks with seasoned flour, shaking off the excess. Heat the oil in a skillet or frying pan, add the steaks, and cook over medium-high heat, turning once, to your preference – 3 minutes for rare, 4 minutes for medium-rare, 6 minutes for medium, or 10 minutes for well done. Remove from the skillet, transfer to a serving dish, keep warm, and let rest.

Add the wine to the skillet and cook over high heat for a few minutes until reduced by half. Add the beans and speck, mix carefully, and cook for 1 minute to heat through. Season with salt and pepper, pour over the steaks, and serve immediately.

Forest fruit gratin with zabaglione

Frutti di bosco gratinati con zabaione

► **SERVES** 4 ► **PREPARATION** 10 minutes ► **COOKING** 10 minutes

INGREDIENTS

500g mixed berries, such as blackberries, raspberries, blueberries, and hulled strawberries

3 egg yolks

65g caster sugar

2 tbsp Grand Marnier, or other orange liqueur

the finely grated zest of ½ a lemon

Cut any large berries in half and divide them among 4 individual flameproof dishes, or alternatively spread them out on the bottom of a large flameproof baking dish.

Preheat the grill.

Beat the egg yolks with the sugar and Grand Marnier in a heatproof bowl. Place the bowl over a saucepan of barely simmering water and cook over low heat, whisking continuously, for 5-8 minutes, until thickened. Do not let the mixture boil.

Remove the bowl from the heat, stir in the grated lemon zest and pour the zabaglione over the fruit. Put the dishes under the grill and cook for 1-2 minutes, or until golden brown. Serve warm or cold.

INFORMATION

► *The Silver Spoon: Quick & Easy Italian Recipes* is published by Phaidon. For your time-limited special offer go to www.phaidon.com/quickandeasybook

THE SILVER SPOON

Quick
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Recipes

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Pronto!

Some of the more complex Italian recipes will take hours to prepare – and just as long to enjoy! – but when you're in a hurry you're going to need quick-and-easy meals to cook. *Italia!* presents five healthy favourites...



Rustic red onion and ricotta tart

Torta rustica di cipolle rosse e ricotta

These simple cheese and onion tartlets will be the perfect addition to any drinks party.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 5 minutes
- **COOKING** 50 minutes

FOR THE PASTRY

130g shortcrust pastry
(to fit a tin 15cm in diameter)
butter, for greasing

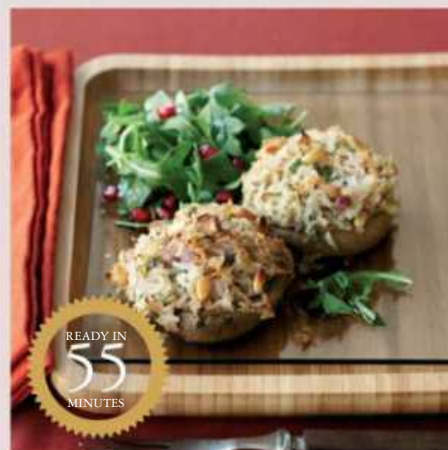
FOR THE FILLING

2 medium red onions, peeled
45ml olive oil
30ml balsamic vinegar
2 tbsp caster sugar
1 free-range egg
150g ricotta
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Preheat the oven to 200°C/Gas Mark 6. Use a mandolin, or a sharp knife, to very finely slice the onions widthwise into rings. Place the onions on a foil-lined baking tray, sprinkle with olive oil, balsamic and sugar, then mix well and place in the oven for 20-25 minutes.

In the meantime, heavily butter the pastry tin, roll the shortcrust pastry out to about 5mm thick, and use it to line the tin. Trim the edge off the sides, then line the inside with parchment paper and cover with ceramic beans. Blind bake in the oven for 15 minutes.

In a bowl, beat the egg with the ricotta, then add the onions and season. Spoon the mixture into the pastry case, place the tart onto a baking tray and cook in the oven at 190°C/Gas Mark 5 for around 25 minutes.



Mushrooms stuffed with wild red rice

Funghi ripieni di riso rosso selvatico

Portobello mushrooms are called for in this meat-textured but vegetarian recipe.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 10 minutes
- **COOKING** 45 minutes

INGREDIENTS

70g riso rosso selvatico	4 large portobello mushrooms
20g pine nuts	salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 small red onion, peeled, finely chopped	FOR THE SALAD
2 tbsp olive oil	80g rocket
30g parmesan or grana padano, grated	seeds from ¼ of a pomegranate
50g mascarpone	1 tbsp olive oil
½ a lemon	1 tsp balsamic vinegar
1 small handful parsley, finely chopped	

Preheat the oven to 220°C/Gas Mark 7. Cook the rice for around 30 minutes according to packet instructions, until al dente. In the meantime, dry toast the pine nuts in a frying pan and set aside. Fry the onion in a separate frying pan containing 1 tsp olive oil, for 4 minutes until lightly coloured. Mix the parmesan and mascarpone together in a bowl, then add lemon zest and juice, toasted pine nuts, onion and parsley. Drain the rice and stir into the mixture.

Remove the stalks from the mushrooms, toss the mushrooms in the remaining oil and season. Lay them in a baking tray, gills facing upwards. Spoon the mixture into the caps and place in the oven for around 15 minutes.

While the mushrooms cook, wash the rocket and make a simple dressing using the olive oil and balsamic vinegar. Sprinkle the rocket with pomegranate seeds, then drizzle with the dressing just before serving. Serve the mushrooms with the salad on the side.



Porcini with potato cakes and radicchio

Porcini con dischetti di patate e radicchio rosso

The jam sets this off beautifully.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 15 minutes
- **COOKING** 40 minutes

INGREDIENTS

450g potatoes	2 tbsp double cream
salt and freshly ground black pepper	1 tbsp lemon juice
2 tbsp olive oil	1 large head of radicchio
20g dried porcini	FOR THE REDCURRANT JAM
unsalted butter	100g redcurrants
1 garlic clove	1 tbsp caster sugar
4 sage leaves	1 tsp lemon juice

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4. Peel and grate the potatoes, dry them, place in a bowl and season. Heat oil in a pan, place four 8cm pastry rings in the pan and spoon potato into each ring to 2.5cm. Fry, then turn over and fry the other side. Place on a lined tray and bake for 15 minutes.

Soak the porcini for 15 minutes in hot water. Drain, retaining the water, then chop roughly. Pass the water through a sieve lined with muslin.

In a pan, heat the redcurrants with sugar and lemon juice. Bring to the boil, remove from the heat.

Heat the butter in a pan, add the garlic and sage. Fry for 1 minute, then add the porcini. Add a little of the reserved water as required, and cook until the porcini are soft. Add the double cream and lemon juice, and stir well. Season and set aside.

Heat a griddle pan, then cut the head of the radicchio into quarters, removing the tough core. Drizzle with 1 tsp olive oil, and place on the griddle pan. Grill on both sides for 2-3 minutes. Remove the potato cakes from oven. Pour the porcini cream over the cakes, and serve the radicchio on the side, drizzled with the redcurrant jam.



Orecchiette with ricotta, peas and mint

Orecchiette con ricotta, piselli e menta

Orecchiette – ‘little ears’ – are the perfect pasta shape to capture peas. This is a very simple demonstration of how the selection of shape is an essential part of any successful pasta recipe.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 5 minutes
- **COOKING** 15 minutes

INGREDIENTS

200g orecchiette
80g peas
100g ricotta
zest and juice of a lemon
40g parmesan or grana padano, grated
a handful of mint leaves, washed

Bring a saucepan of water to the boil, add the orecchiette and cook for 10-15 minutes according to packet instructions, until al dente.

Cook the peas in a saucepan of salted boiling water for 2-3 minutes, then drain.

Beat the ricotta with the lemon juice and zest, stir in the parmesan and mint, then the peas.

Drain the orecchiette, return to the saucepan and stir in the ricotta mixture. Serve immediately.



Courgette crumble with figs and dolcelatte

Gratinato di zucchine, fichi e dolcelatte

If you, or any of your friends, have a garden, then you will know what a courgette glut is. This is a fantastically simple but delicious alternative to yet another round of fritters!

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 10 minutes
- **COOKING** 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

500g courgettes
1 tbsp olive oil
50g fresh white breadcrumbs, finely crumbled from day-old bread
30g unsalted butter, cubed
1 tbsp thyme leaves, removed from the branches
40g parmesan or grana padano, grated
125g dolcelatte
2-3 figs

Preheat the oven to 200°C/Gas Mark 6. Wash then chop the courgettes into 5mm rounds. Heat the olive oil in a frying pan and add the courgettes.

Lower the heat, place a lid on the pan and leave to cook for 5 minutes. Remove the lid and cook for further 5-10 minutes until tender and the juices have mostly evaporated.

In a bowl combine the breadcrumbs, butter, thyme and parmesan, rubbing with your fingers to create a crumble.

Spread the courgettes over the base of a baking dish, then cut or crumble the dolcelatte over the top. Slice the figs and lay them on top of the courgettes. Top with the crumble mixture, and place in the oven for 20 minutes, until lovely and golden. Serve with crusty bread and a simple salad.

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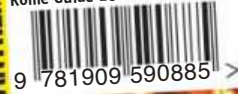
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BAROLO

Amidst the mist... The cold fog that settles on the hills of the Langhe helps to shape one of the world's most renowned wines. **Paul Pettengale** reflects on why it's so distinctive...

One of my very dearest friends has just bought a wine shop. And not just any old wine shop, but one in an upmarket town in Devon. He and his business partner intend to stock wines from just two countries: Italy and France. He called me a couple of weeks ago, the excitement in his voice palpable, asking me: "Do you remember that Barolo we drank at your house, oh, about ten years ago? I need to get the number for the supplier". His wife had described it as the best wine she had ever drunk. He was determined that it should be on his shelves. I knew exactly which wine he was referring to. It was memorable for the fact that it had come from a magnum I'd been gifted when visiting the producer. (I'd bought rather a lot of the stuff and had it shipped back to the UK. This was a bonus, as it were.) I asked my

My friend's wife described that Barolo as the best wine she had ever drunk

friend what it was that stuck in his mind about this particular wine. "You can taste the vine, right down to its roots in the soil." To which I replied: "No, you can taste the grapes right into the air that surrounds them."

Barolo is made – as most *Italia!* readers will know – from the wonderful Nebbiolo grape variety. Nebbiolo is thought to have gained its name from the mist and fog that engulfs the steep hills of the Langhe. It can get cold, and so the grapes on those vines ripen very slowly. They don't produce a great deal of sugar. And so the tannins take a long time to break down. Barolo wines can take an age to mature, but when they're ready – maybe a decade from the harvest (or more) – you're rewarded with wines that will stay in your memory forever. Just like that one did with my friend. ➤



BAROLO DI SERRALUNGA D'ALBA DOCG 2011, FONTANAFREDDA

From Great Western Wine
www.greatwesternwine.co.uk
 Price £31.00 (see text)

Barolo is all about character, and this wine from renowned producer Fontanafredda has plenty of it. No, make that *a lot* of it. It's dry, though it fills the mouth nicely, featuring rose petal hints on top of a great big dollop of spiced vanilla. The tannins are very much present, but softened, and the finish has ample depth. Oh, and GWW are currently selling it for just £19.99 a bottle. Snap it up before the price rises back up to its usual level.

BAROLO 2011 NATALE VERGA

From Majestic
www.majestic.co.uk
 Price £25.00

The Verga family estate has been growing Nebbiolo grape vines for 120 years, and their experience and sheer ability shows through in this wine from Majestic. It's a classic-style Barolo, full of chocolate and cigar box aromas; plums and forest fruit to taste and a strong tannic backbone. The finish is to die for... It's rich and warm and goes on for ever. Though, once gone you can only be satisfied by taking another sip. Great value for money, this is a wonderful Barolo that simply has to be sampled.

BAROLO 2011, TERREDAVINO

From Waitrose
www.waitrose.com
 Price £17.49

Okay, so this is entry-level stuff when it comes to Barolo, but at just £17.49 a bottle you're picking up a steal by plucking this from the shelf of your local Waitrose store. This is a robust wine, though one that is not without a subtle degree of character. It has damson and black cherry aromas with a touch of vanilla. It fills the mouth, but is neither overly tannic nor heavy; it ranks as a medium-bodied wine. The finish is slightly abrupt, but rewarding nonetheless. Would work well with a Sunday lunch.

BAROLO 2011, MASSOLINO

From Liberty Wines
www.libertywine.co.uk
 Price £41.00

This is a very distinctive Barolo that blends a respect for tradition with the wine world's hunger for modernity. Franco Massolino has been at the helm of this 100-plus year old company since 1994, and during that time he has introduced production techniques that, whilst preserving all that is great (and challenging!) about the Nebbiolo grape variety, have managed to tame the tannins. He presents a wonderfully soft, satisfying wine, focusing on the depth of fruit, flavour and a lingering finish.



GREAT WITH...

A great wine to drink with veal, either slow-roasted or (a local speciality), raw.



GREAT WITH...

Bash out a piece of rump steak, flash fry it and serve it with roasted potatoes.



GREAT WITH...

This Barolo works well with lamb, ideally slow-roasted shoulder or in a stew.



GREAT WITH...

Invite some friends round for a Sunday roast – beef would be perfect.

BAROLO 2010, FRATELLI ALESSANDRIA

From **Berry Bros. & Rudd**
www.bbr.com

Price **£25.95**

This is Berry Bros. & Rudd's 'house' Barolo, coming within the BBR home brand. But is far from a 'standard' wine... Aged in Slavonian oak barrels, this 2010 vintage is an exceptionally fine one, resplendent with an orchestra of spice aromas (from clove to cardamon and beyond). It's bold and crunchy in the mouth without ever feeling overpowering or bossy. Forest fruit combine with dark chocolate and wood smoke. And, best of all, a case of it won't break the bank.



GREAT WITH...

Hard cheeses, fillet steak (or ribeye), griddle pan-fried lamb chops.

BAROLO 2011, PRUNOTTO

From **Berkmann**
www.berkmann.co.uk
Price **£35.00**

Should you enjoy a Barolo than is warm and spicy, then this is the pick of the bunch. And if you're a cheese lover, then all the better, because this really works well with strong-tasting cheeses (even the blues). The aroma is intoxicating in itself, bringing on clove, bramble, sodden earth and forest fruits. When supped the wine rewards you with a big mouthful of dark cherry, followed by a smoky, satisfying finish. So, get a slab of aged pecorino up to room temperature and pop the cork on this baby!



GREAT WITH...

We enjoyed this wine with some strong blue cheeses and crispy red grapes.

BAROLO 2011, ARALDICA

From **Majestic**
www.majestic.co.uk
Price **£15.99**

If you prefer the modern, lighter style of Barolo then this wine, produced by Araldica and supplied by Majestic, is for you. It retains the depth of charm of a classic Barolo wine, but it's less demanding than many of the examples from the region. It has bright aromas of sweet cherries and gentle spices, and it's soft and pleasing in the mouth with virtually no tannins of note. The finish isn't especially long or complex. Definitely at the lighter end of the Barolo spectrum.



GREAT WITH...

Try this with duck ragù served with your favourite type of pasta.

BAROLO'S LITTLE SISTER

Barolo wines can be challenging, for sure. They can be overly tannic in their youth, taking an age to soften and approach drinkability. That said, modern winemaking practices are helping to tame the beast! However, if you're after a softer, more approachable take on the Nebbiolo grape variety, then do sample some Barbaresco wines. The vineyards are within just a few miles of the Barolo zone, but they present a wine that's easier to drink, and at a younger age. They're just as complex as Barolo, but the Barbaresco – the Queen of Wines to Barolo's King – is more subtle, fresher and a touch crisper.

If you're after a softer, more approachable take on the Nebbiolo grape variety



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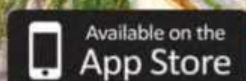


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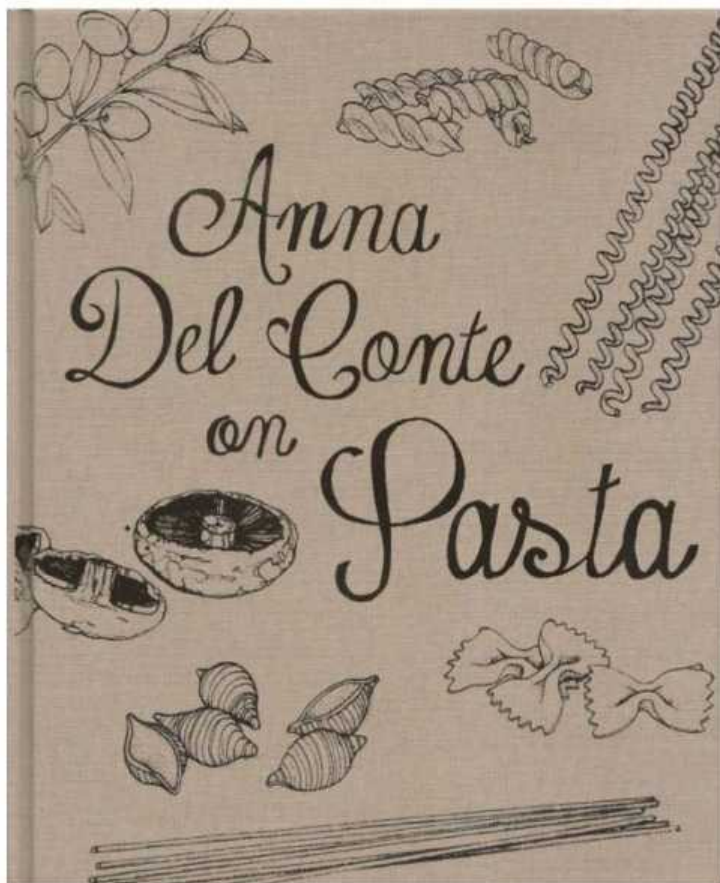
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IN PRINT

In this month's **book review section** we continue our food and drink theme with a selection of recipe books, essential wine tomes (and a guide to walking off the culinary excesses). Oh, and some food for thought.



ANNA DEL CONTE ON PASTA

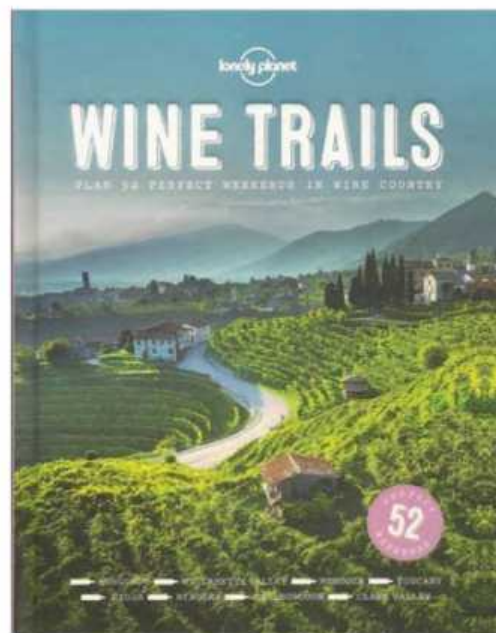
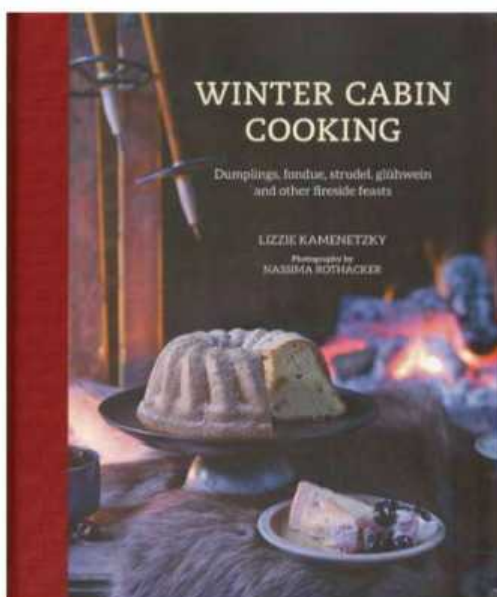
Anna Del Conte, Pavilion Books, £20.00 (hardback)

Born in 1925 in Italy, Anna del Conte moved to England in 1949, embarking on a mission to educate us Brits (and other English-speaking nations) about Italian food. Her *Gastronomy of Italy* is legendary, and deserves to be sat on the kitchen bookshelf of anyone who's so much as raised a piece of *lasagne al forno* to their mouths. Likewise, her *Portrait of Pasta* is a cook's favourite. And her reprisal of the book, almost 40 years since it was first published, and now called *Anna del Conte on Pasta*, is definitely a work of art for those of you who wish to enjoy either fresh or dried pasta with your favourite sauces, or baked with meats and cheeses. There are 120 recipes included within this 200-plus page hardbacked book, though please note that it does not contain photographs of the dishes in question. There are some nice black-and-white illustrations, but that's it. Having said that, the first 60 or so pages detail the fascinating history of pasta, with chapters on the multitudinous varieties, how to buy pasta, how to make it, pasta recipes from the past and the people behind this most famous of Italian staples. If you love your pasta, then you're going to love this book. It's the bible of pasta, if you will.

WINTER CABIN COOKING

Lizzie Kamenetzky, Ryland Peters & Small, £19.99 (hardback)

A roaring fire, a glass of mulled wine (Chianti, of course) and, well, what to cook? *Winter Cabin Cooking* has 150 answers to that question, detailing recipes from mountain regions and ski resorts in Italy and beyond. Warming dishes all, these are inspiring and mouthwatering. Pack your slippers though.



▲ WINE TRAILS

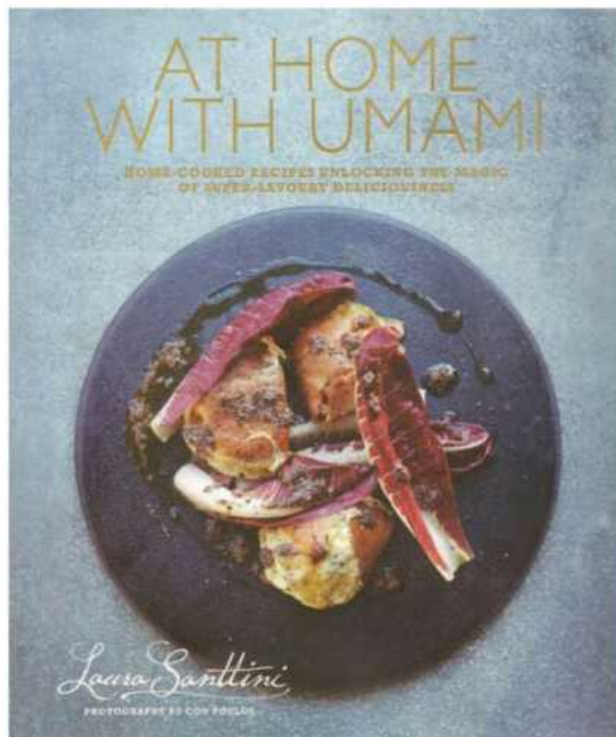
Various authors, Lonely Planet, £19.99 (hardback)

This great new book from Lonely Planet provides you with '52 perfect weekends', though we'd suggest you don't try to do one after the other... It spans 20 countries renowned for their wines, with 52 itineraries that span no fewer than 327 wineries, including visits to the best across seven of Italy's wine-producing regions – Friuli, Tuscany, Piedmont, Puglia and more.

AT HOME WITH UMAMI

Laura Santtini, Ryland
Peters & Small, £19.99
(hardback)

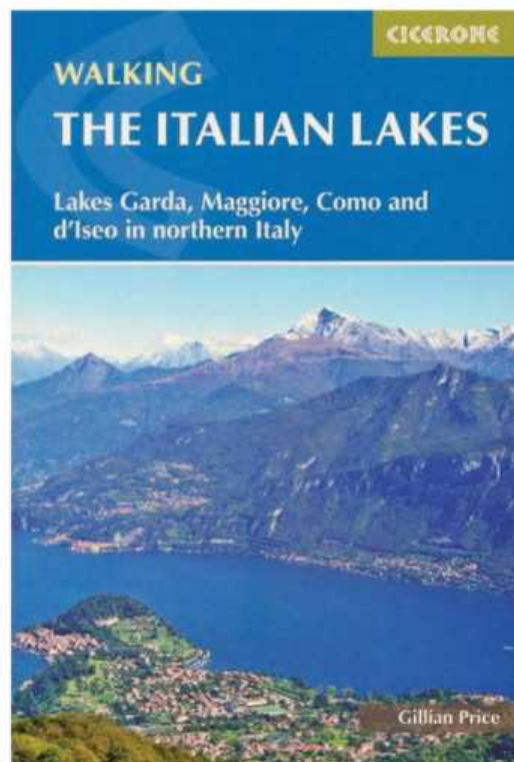
Famed for her first book, *Easy Tasty Italian*, Laura Santtini now grapples with the more complex concept of umami, the so-called fifth taste that translates from Japanese as 'savoury deliciousness'. Dozens of beautifully photographed recipes are presented, many of them with a distinctly Italian bent. Salami and chestnut porchetta? Tomato risotto with kale pesto? Plenty to choose from!



WALKING THE ITALIAN LAKES

Gillian Price, Cicerone,
£14.95 (paperback)

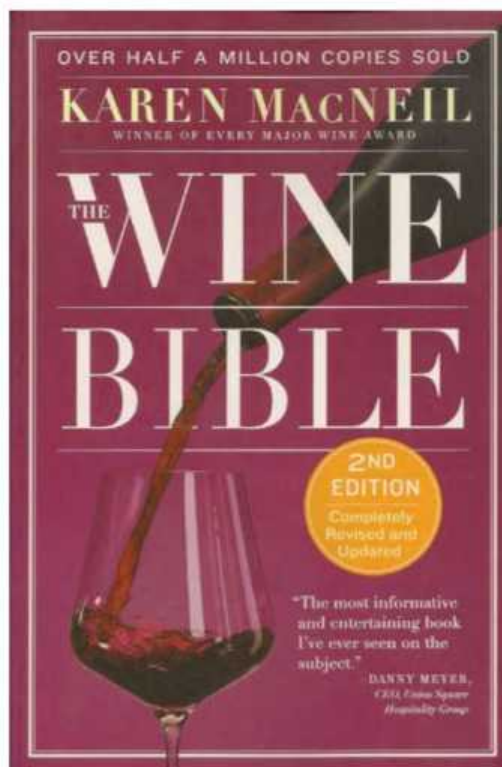
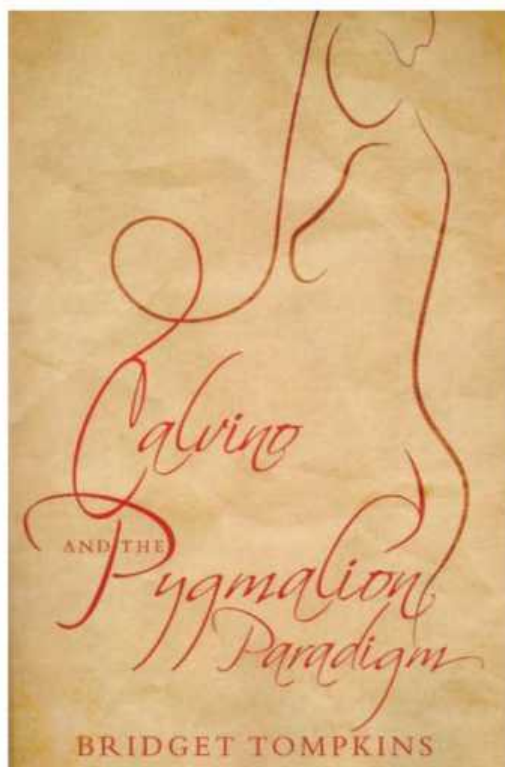
You've had your fill and now it's time to walk it off, and what better and more scenic place to achieve just that than the Italian Lakes? This guide details 50 invigorating walks around Lakes Maggiore, Como, Iseo and Garda. Each has easy-to-follow maps and description of what to see and do.



CALVINO AND THE PYGMALION PARADIGM

Bridget Tompkins, Troubador Publishing, £24.95 (paperback)

You've fed your body with our selection of titles this month, now it's time to feed your mind... Though take a deep breath first, as this "first book-length analysis of the representation of the feminine in Calvino's fiction" is an extremely detailed (and academic) look at the perception of the female ideal throughout Calvino's narratives. It aims to "demonstrate how Calvino used his female characters as foils for the existential reflections of his typically maladjusted and narcissistic male characters". Phew.



THE WINE BIBLE (2ND EDITION)

Karen MacNeil, Workman
Publishing, £16.99
(paperback)

This book is called a bible for good reason, as it stretches to 1,000 pages and provides one of the most authoritative publication on the world's grape-based tipples. It opens with a section on what makes a great wine, how to store them and, of course, how to taste them. It then presents an extensive glossary of wine before embarking on a tour of the world, taking the best grape varieties (and what they go on to produce) from countries including Italy, France, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Spain, Germany, Austria, and even the likes of the Republic of Georgia and Greece. If you like a drop or two, then this is the one book you'll need in order to experience the best on offer. ■

NEXT MONTH IN ITALIA!

48 HOURS IN PERUGIA

Take some time out in the capital city of the region of Umbria, famed for its university, its Etruscan heritage and its art, culture and architecture...

TRUE COLOURS

After 50 years, what next for fashion brand Benetton?
Find out in our exclusive interview

LIVING THE HIGH LIFE

How, where and why buying an Italian apartment makes a whole lot of sense

PLUS Staying in a fine family hotel in southern Sardinia, a tour of Martin Scorsese's villa in Sicily, Roman recipes from the Caldesis, the best fresh and jarred pesto, homes to buy in Le Marche, events to enjoy across the peninsula and much, much more

Contents may be subject to change

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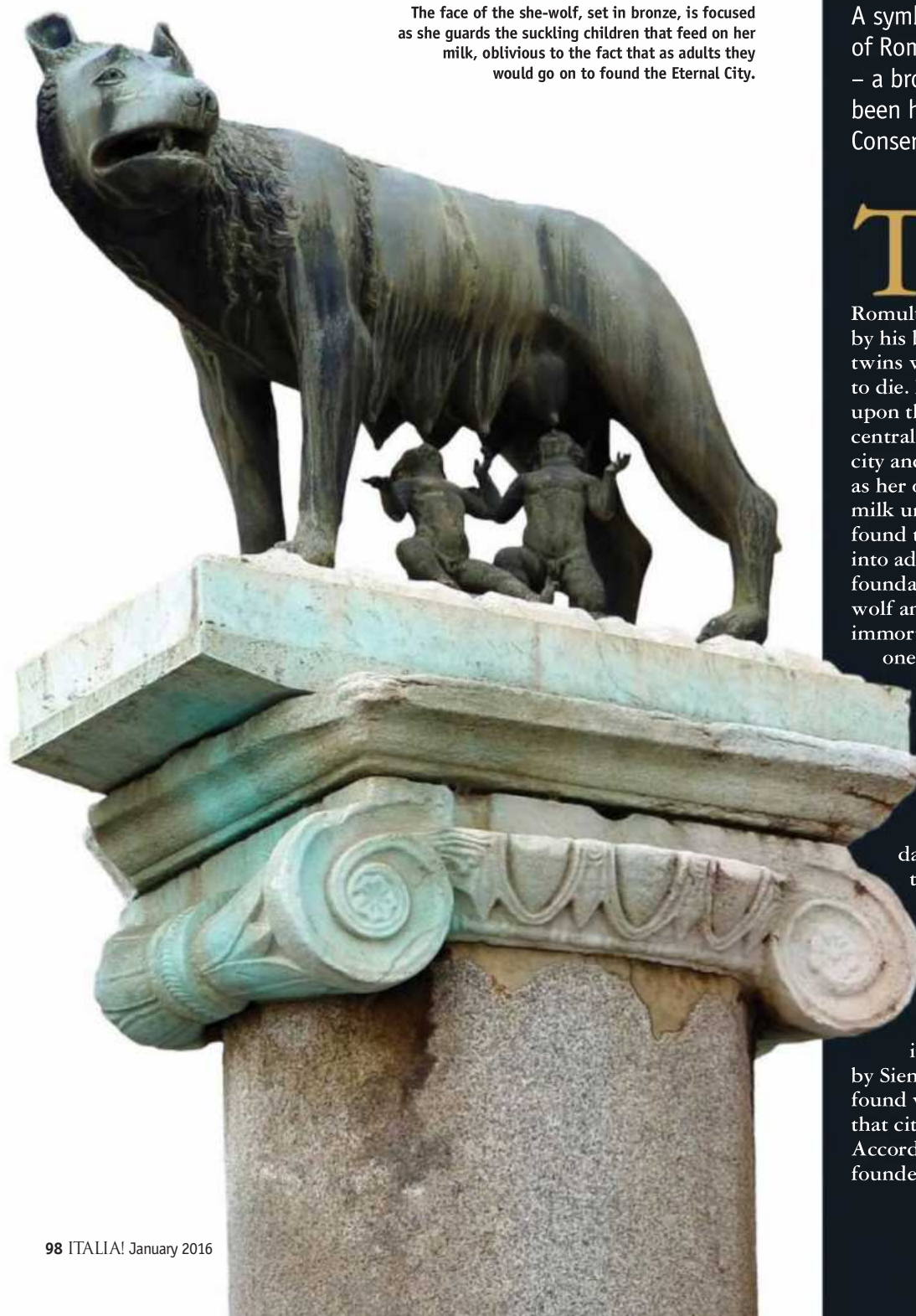
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ITALIA! ICONS

The face of the she-wolf, set in bronze, is focused as she guards the suckling children that feed on her milk, oblivious to the fact that as adults they would go on to found the Eternal City.



#06

THE CAPITOLINE WOLF

A symbol of the very founding of Rome, the Capitoline Wolf – a bronze sculpture – has been housed in the Palazzo dei Conservatori since 1471.

The story goes like this... It was as long ago as the mid-700s BC. Numitor, the grandfather of the twins Romulus and Remus, was usurped by his brother Amulius, and the twins were cast into the Tiber River to die. However, a she-wolf chanced upon those who were to become central to the creation of Rome as a city and civilization and raised them as her own, feeding them with her milk until a shepherd, Faustulus, found them and looked after them into adulthood. The symbol of the foundation of Rome – the she-wolf and the suckling twins – was immortalised in bronze, though no one knows precisely when. Very early statues of the scene are said to have dated back to around 300BC, though the bronze version that resides in the museum of the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Rome has been carbon-dated to have been cast around the 11th or 12th centuries AD. As well as being a symbol representing the foundation of Rome (it was favoured by Mussolini, who declared himself the founder of 'New Rome') it has also been adopted by Siena, and an example can be found within walking distance of that city's famed Piazza del Campo. According to legend, Siena was founded by two sons of Remus. ■

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